

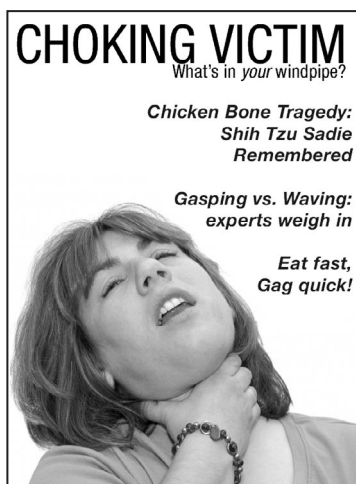
STAY FREE!



\$3.95 US | \$5.95 CAN
Free in Brooklyn



PRANKS ISSUE



take your pick

Unlike other magazines, *Stay Free!* is created for readers, not advertisers. That's why we beg for money. Subscriptions to *Stay Free!* are \$10.95 for three issues—or \$7.95 for digital issues—and include invitations to *Stay Free!* events, internet-only updates, and the joy (not to mention the good karma) that comes with supporting independent publishing. You can pay by credit card on our web site, stayfreemagazine.org. Or send a check to *Stay Free!* 23 Hawthorne Street, Brooklyn, NY 11225 (see the handy order form on page 6). We gladly accept (tax-deductible!) donations at this address as well.

buy stuff online at stayfreemagazine.org



mass media, consumer culture & Brooklyn curiosities

- 7 From the Bush Twins to the Anorexic Beach Lady**
Interview with Museum of Hoaxes curator Alex Boese.
- 13 Ever Pull a Good Prank?**
We asked our readers. Here's what they had to say.
- 16 Hoaxes in History: The Report from Iron Mountain**
- 18 Media Virus**
Social networking expert Jonah Peretti explains how silly videos and email pranks created the Bored at Work Network.
- 15 Prank'd! A few of our recent faves**
- 28 Indecent Exposure**
The truth behind overpopulation, the Church of Euthanasia, and the Jerry Springer Show; by Nina Paley, as told to Audrey Tempelsman.
- 30 George Parker: The Man Who Sold New York (comics)**
- 32 The Organization Man**
How far will a Starbucks employee go to please a fictitious boss?
- 36 From "Whassup?" to "Shut Up!"**
What does pop language tell us about our world? Interview with cultural critic Leslie Savan.
- 40 The Secret Lives of Brooklyn Doormen**
Photo essay by David Gochfeld.
- 46 Around Town with Eugene Mirman**
The local comic reviews restaurants in brownstone Brooklyn
- 48 Crossword: In Honor of Maclaren**
- 49 An Inquiry into the Effects of Preservatives in McDonald's Food; or, What Does the Fungus Know That You Don't?**
- 50 Hoax-o-Matic**
A guide to calling journalists on their bluffs.
- 54 Benjamin Franklin: Original Prankster**
- 56 My New Favorite Thing**
Books, magazines, and other items we fancy

TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS



fabulous electronic rock n' roll!

brooklyn's finest since 2003

NEEDFUL THINGS [thedebutlp.] COMING SOON

<http://www.myspace.com/theidols>



William "Bill" Torchinsky

My father died on December 19, 2005. This issue of *Stay Free!* is dedicated to him, and, as the pranks issue, I think it's a particularly fitting one. I loved my dad for many reasons, one being that he was a very funny man. Not in a joke-telling kind of way—more of a free-form, screw-with-you way. Plus, he was incapable of being embarrassed. He must have lacked the chromosome that makes people avoid seeming like a total loon in public.

My dad's pranks weren't particularly elaborate, but they were constant. In his early days, he terrorized Catskills-area young adult holiday camps as a jockstrap-clad Zorro, antics which got him banned from such establishments. (Many old Jews of the era tell me that is no mean feat.)

His marriage to my mom provided 40 years of companionship, love, and

the ready availability of a gullible mark. Whether he was pretending to talk her out of shoplifting at a crowded Bloomingdale's, staging vicious fights with friends at the company cafeteria, or convincing her that her son was in various states of trouble, my mother fell for it every time—which, I suspect, made my dad love her all the more.

The only truly lasting evidence I have of my dad's love of pranks are perhaps his most visionary ones: two audiotapes containing his New Year's Eve crank calls.

In 1972, my father pioneered the recorded prank phone call. His method was simple. Dial a random number on New Year's Eve, and, when someone answers, tell him you're on the way to the party and couldn't remember what else they wanted you to bring. Improvise from there.

Some people had parties and would delicately try to figure out who my dad was; some had no party, prompting my dad to urge them to have one. With other victims, my dad would try to wheedle his way into getting invited to wherever they were headed. The goal was to keep people talking as long as possible—while secretly recording—and the results were pretty impressive. People gave all kinds of personal information, got indignant, and then warmed up. Some hung up on him.

I turned the prank phone calls into mp3s that you can download at vgg.com/wildbill. I encourage everyone to download them and enjoy the pranks of a true pioneer in the field, and a wonderful dad who will be sorely missed.

—Jason Torchinsky

STAY FREE!

EDITOR & ART DIRECTOR
Carrie McLaren

VICE PRESIDENTS
Charles Star & Jason Torchinsky

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
Kristen Sollee

COPY EDITORS
Phoebe Connelly, Aaron Jollay, Jennie Kaufman, Siel

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Carrie McLaren, Rick Prelinger, Alexandra Ringe

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE
Francis Heaney, Joe the Peacock, David Gochfeld, Steve Lambert, Kembrew McLeod, Eugene Mirman, Audrey Tempelsman, Kyle Pellet. Cover photos by William Moree (models: Damian Chadwick, David Gochfeld, Heidi Cody). Panexa ad by Jason Torchinsky.

Stay Free! is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit magazine that explores the politics and perversions of mass media and American culture. We also do a similarly-themed blog, *Stay Free! Daily*, at blog.stayfreemagazine.org.

Much thanks to Molly Aboud for lending her editing genius.

Stay Free! is published roughly once every ten months. Some people seem to think that's funny...whatever, just send us your money. Donations are tax-deductible, yes.

Stay Free! welcomes outside contributors; write a letter pitching your idea and send pertinent samples of your work.

Stay Free! is distributed in book and record stores across the U.S. and Canada, as well as eateries and shops in brownstone Brooklyn. If you do not see *Stay Free!* at your local bookstore, please inquire within. For a list of places where you can find us, see our website.

WE HAVE A NEW ADDRESS:

Stay Free!
23 Hawthorne Street, Brooklyn, NY 11225
www.stayfreemagazine.org



STAY FREE! ORDER FORM

Checks payable to Stay Free! Shipping is free in the USA. (Add \$1 per item for Canada.*) Check or money order payable to: Stay Free! 23 Hawthorne Street, Brooklyn, NY 11225.

ORDER BY
CREDIT CARD AT
stayfreemagazine.org

subscriptions (3 issues)

- ☐ Digital only \$7.95 • Receive pdfs via email
- ☐ Bargain rate \$10.95
- ☐ Nice person rate \$20.95 • Includes \$10 donation**
- ☐ Intelligent person rate \$40.95 • Includes \$30 donation and thanks in magazine
- ☐ Genius rate \$110.95 • Includes \$100 donation

Start with issue # _____

back issues (\$4 each)

- ☐ #16: Medical ads. Jhally v. Twitchell. Mindlessness.
- ☐ #18: History issue.
- ☐ #21: Psychology issue.
- ☐ #22: Eugenics, dog breeding, subliminal advertising.
- ☐ #23: Wal-Mart, Jake Greene, *American Gentrifier*.
- ☐ #24: Flash mobs, McDonald's, idiot consumers.

DVDs and other goods

- ☐ Illegal Art DVD-R, \$30 • Includes Todd Haynes' *Superstar*, Eric Fensler's "GI Joe" PSAs, Eugene Mirman, more.
- ☐ Illegal Art CD, \$8.95 • Compilation of copyright-infringing songs from Negativland, Biz Markie, De La Soul, the Verve, John Oswald, Elastica, Public Enemy, Culturecide, more.
- ☐ Anti-SUV postcards • 6 for \$3
- ☐ Negativland *No Business*, \$15 • The latest from these lovable weirdos, comes with anti-copyright whoopee cushion.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY/STATE/ZIP

EMAIL

* For subscriptions to other countries, add \$10. For other items, add \$3 per item.

** Donations are tax-deductible; Stay Free! is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

FROM THE BUSH TWINS TO THE ANOREXIC BEACH LADY

Museum of Hoaxes curator Alex Boese studies hoaxes in American history



Tall-tale postcard by W. H. Martin, 1910

STAY FREE!: Let's talk a bit about history. Where did hoaxes come from?

ALEX BOESE: They seem to have originated in open, democratic societies like England and America.

STAY FREE!: Why is that?

BOESE: I think it's because in countries where you had an active public culture, people were constantly jockeying to capture the public's attention, and hoaxing turned out to be a very effective way to do that.

STAY FREE!: So where would you place its modern origins? I'm thinking of Barnum . . .

BOESE: Barnum definitely invented the hoax as a tool for advertising. But before Barnum, in the 18th century, you had hoaxers like the satirist Jonathan Swift, who used

hoaxes as a way to enlighten the public. I place the origin of hoaxing with the 18th-century Enlightenment. Before that, the concept of hoaxing didn't really exist. Of course, you had plenty of deception going on, but it wasn't intended to influence public opinion.

STAY FREE!: There was a vogue among newspapers for hoaxes in the 1800s, which I think is interesting in light of the fact that daily newspapers are now rather staid, corporate enterprises.

BOESE: Well, we also have the tabloids, which very much carry on the tradition of sensationalism. There's *Weekly World News*, which is really more of a humor paper than a newspaper, but it still manages to fool people periodically.

STAY FREE!: But were hoaxes limited to tabloids?

BOESE: In the 19th century you had so-called six-cent pa-

pers, which were your boring business papers, and then you had the penny papers, which reported all the local gossip and crime news. The hoaxes appeared in the penny papers. The six-cent papers were eventually driven out of business by the penny papers, and the pennies turned into the newspapers of today. For instance, the *International Herald Tribune* traces back to a penny paper founded in the 1830s, the *New York Herald*.

STAY FREE!: What was the most successful newspaper hoax, in terms of driving circulation?

BOESE: Supposedly, the great moon hoax of 1835. The *New York Sun* reported that life had been discovered on the moon. So many people bought the paper to read this news that, the story goes, it tripled the *Sun's* circulation and simultaneously established penny papers as a viable business enterprise, therefore paving the way for the emergence of the modern media. But stories about hoaxes are very, very prone to exaggeration. I went back and looked at copies of the *Sun* from 1835 and there's no indication that the moon hoax actually did triple its circulation. I think it's just one of the legends of journalism.

STAY FREE!: Wasn't it also said that the *Sun's* competitor also saw a rise in sales for debunking the hoax?

BOESE: Yes, the *New York Herald* also supposedly saw a boost in sales. But I think what really boosted their sales in the long run was the simple fact that they were fun to read. Also, these penny papers were sold on the street, and thus were more accessible. They weren't sold solely by subscription like the more traditional elite papers.

STAY FREE!: I loved Veterans of Future Wars, that group from the 1930s. Was that a pacifist effort?

BOESE: Veterans of Future Wars began as a kind of conservative outcry against government spending. They were protesting the Harrison Bonus Bill, which gave veterans of World War I their war bonuses ten years earlier than planned. This inspired some students at Princeton to suggest that war bonuses be given to soldiers much earlier. Why not pay the bonuses before the soldiers even go to war? Give them to Veterans of Future Wars. This was the origin of the hoax, but the idea got picked up by the pacifist movement as a way to ridicule militarism in general.

STAY FREE!: In terms of the available media, it seems like there'd be major differences between hoaxes today and those a hundred years ago. Would you say that's true?

BOESE: The big difference today is the internet. The internet allows *anyone* to make a hoax. You don't have to be connected to the news industry. But in terms of subject

matter, hoaxes haven't changed much. Some of the old favorites still occur regularly today: death hoaxes, for example—reporting that someone famous died. Then there are the fake creatures. A hundred years ago people loved to send tall-tale postcards to friends showing enormous animals and enormous pieces of corn. That's not much different from one of the most widely spread internet hoaxes, which was a picture of an enormous cat, dubbed "Snowball the monster cat." And fake inventions—that's another perennial favorite.

STAY FREE!: The most interesting hoaxes to me are those conducted for political or social ends. I was really struck by one from the 1860s. The Democrats, hoping to defeat the Republican candidate for president [Lincoln], secretly authored a pamphlet that argued for "miscegenation" and made it seem as if race-mixing was part of the Republican platform. I did a double take when I read about this because it reminded me of contemporary Republican campaign practices.

BOESE: Politics has always been fertile ground for hoaxing. It goes back to the effort to influence public opinion. There was a term coined in the 19th century—*roorback*—to denote a piece of slander invented for political sabotage. The term owed its origins to a book by "Baron von Roorback" that included an allegation that President Polk abused his slaves. But it all turned out to be fake.

Similarly, during the 1950s, a photo emerged showing Senator Tydings chatting with a leader of the American Communist Party. The photo cost him the election, and it turned out that the photo was fake.

STAY FREE!: You wrote about Dick Tuck, a political prankster who was always going after Nixon. Do you have a favorite Dick Tuck prank?

BOESE: Once Nixon was giving a speech from the back of a train, so Tuck dressed up as a train conductor and signalled the train to leave the station. Nixon just stood there helplessly, still trying to give his speech as the train began pulling out and the audience grew further and further away. I also like the prank where Tuck paid pregnant women to carry signs at a Nixon rally saying "Nixon's the One."

STAY FREE!: Nixon even tried to imitate Tuck.

BOESE: Right. Nixon said that the Republicans needed to develop a "Dick Tuck capability." But the Republicans never could. Their idea of funny pranks was accusing people of being racist.

STAY FREE!: I'm curious where you draw the line between propaganda and hoax. Could weapons of mass destruction be considered a hoax? Or Bush's video press releases,



THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS
TWIN CINEMA
 CD • LP



CAT POWER
THE GREATEST
 CD • LP



BELLE AND SEBASTIAN
THE LIFE PURSUIT
 CD • DBL LP • CD & DVD



MOGWAI
MR. BEAST
 CD • DBL LP • CD & DVD
 MARCH 7 2006



PRETTY GIRLS MAKE GRAVES
ÉLAN VITAL
 CD • LP
 APRIL 11 2006



matadorrecords.com



which were designed to look like news reports, but used actors as journalists?

BOESE: There are constant struggles to label certain things hoaxes. Some groups want to label WMDs as a hoax; others don't. Ultimately, what gets labelled a hoax is largely a matter of who has the power to enforce their point of view in the media.

STAY FREE!: Have you ever found yourself dismissing something as false that turned out to be true, and then sort of kicking yourself?

BOESE: Back in the 1970s there was a tribe discovered in the Philippines, the Stone Age Tasaday. Supposedly, they had never made contact with the outside world before. Then, in the 1980s, an anthropologist discovered that these "tribe members" had actually been paid by the Marcos government to dress up like Stone Age people and pose for the cameras. He cried hoax and everyone, including me, assumed he was right. But new evidence indicates that the Tasaday legend is at least partly true. Everyone loves to cry hoax, but sometimes the truth isn't so black-and-white.

STAY FREE!: On your blog, you mentioned a rumor that

the guy who sold ad space on his forehead was a hoax. Yet that rumor was false. Have you ever worried about your site becoming a source for spreading misinformation?

BOESE: By letting people freely comment, my hope is that any misinformation can be checked pretty quickly. The best antidote to the spread of misinformation is to allow public discussion and analysis so the truth can emerge.

STAY FREE!: But more information doesn't necessarily lead to greater understanding. For instance, after subliminal advertising was revealed as a hoax, advertising professors continued to teach about it in order to debunk it, but they inadvertently ended up spreading the myth even further.

Are there hoaxes that have inspired people to conduct their own hoaxes?

BOESE: There's the whole eBay phenomenon. One man sold a ghost in a jar on eBay and inspired hundreds of copycats, who began selling haunted Coke cans, haunted toasters, even a haunted Gmail account. And the Kaycee Nicole Swenson hoax inspired many imitators. Kaycee Nicole was supposedly a 19-year-old girl dying of leukemia. She kept an online journal about her experiences, right up until her "death." But it turned out that Kaycee Nicole was really

the alter ego of a middle-aged woman named Debbie Swenson, who didn't have cancer and was still very much alive. The idea of using an alter ego to author an online journal triggered a whole wave of fake blogs.

STAY FREE!: Was she actively trying to fool people?

BOESE: Yes.

STAY FREE!: Was she mentally ill?

BOESE: I don't know if she was ever hospitalized or seen by a psychiatrist, but the medical term "Munchausen syndrome by internet" was inspired, in large part, by her case.

STAY FREE!: The underlying motivations for hoaxers can differ so widely it seems almost disingenuous to even consider something like this in the same category as a very calculated hoax like the *Report from Iron Mountain* (page 16).

BOESE: Debbie Swenson was a pathological liar, but otherwise perfectly capable of functioning in the world. I like to say that there are two basic kinds of hoaxes: hoaxes that are designed to be exposed and hoaxes that are not, in which the person is simply trying to get away with something.

STAY FREE!: What about the people who aren't consciously lying?

BOESE: If you're not purposefully deceiving others, it's not a hoax.

STAY FREE!: Yes, but I wonder whether Swenson or some of the other people who you consider hoaxers were really aware that they were lying. It seems like they were caught up in some fantasy life.

There's a new book out on MIT Press called *Brain Fiction* about the tendency of some neurological patients to make up stories without realizing that they're false. When a doctor asks one of these hospital patients how she did over the weekend, she might say she went to the theater with her sons, even though she's obviously been in bed the whole time. The author has a theory that the part of the brain responsible for checking your thoughts is separate from the part where those thoughts originate.

In the 1950s, a propagandist acquired photos of an American Communist Party leader, Earl Browder (top left) and Senator Millard E. Tydings (top right) and created a composite of the two (bottom). The fake was then used to link Tydings to the communists, and ultimately cost him his re-election.

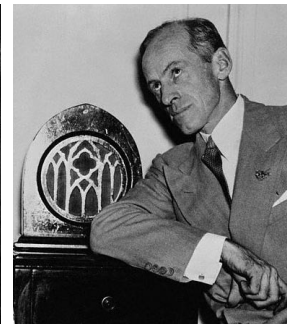
BOESE: Over time people can definitely convince themselves of the truth of their lies. So if you're going to label something a hoax you have to play a guessing game about whether the person originally knew they were lying. This question comes up with Emperor Norton, who lived in San Francisco at the end of the 19th century. He declared himself emperor of the United States and paraded around San Francisco in his emperor's outfit. Was he a madman who believed he was emperor, or was it all an elaborate game?

STAY FREE!: Some of American history's finest journalists—H. L. Mencken, A. J. Liebling, and Joseph Mitchell—fabricated characters and events in their stories. No one today thinks of these men as hoaxsters. And yet Stephen Glass and Jayson Blair are notorious for their journalistic lies. What's the difference, really?

BOESE: There are different standards of ethics in journalism nowadays. Also, the lies of Mencken et al. probably fall more into the category of tall tales.

STAY FREE!: Does the museum make enough money for you to live on?

BOESE: When I first created Museum of Hoaxes it didn't make any money at all. It still doesn't make enough for me to live on, unless I was willing to live like a starving graduate student. ■





PASSERBY®

look for the debut album
on **iTunes** - Tuesday, May 16th
2006, on **Dairyland** Records

www.passerbypop.com
www.myspace.com/passerbypop

We asked our readers, “Ever pull a good prank?”

Here’s what they had to say.

As an undergrad at James Madison University, in Virginia, I took an innovative arts class whose course description invited students to “fuck shit up,” or at least that’s how I read it. For my final project, I orchestrated a media prank. I began by writing letters to the campus newspaper making up absurd claims about why the JMU school mascot, the Duke Dog, should be replaced. The letters were written at the height of the PC movement backlash, so I pushed buttons with lines like, “it is degrading to celebrate a dog that yearns to be free, but can’t ...”

I collected over 400 signatures for a petition that favored changing the Duke Dog to “Dukie the Three-Eyed Pig with Antlers.” The fact that 400 people signed such a document fueled the paranoia of those who

feared my noble cause would prevail. At the height of the nuttiness, the front page of the student paper listed the day’s top news stories in order of importance: 1. “Duke Dog Controversy;” 2. “Traumatic drama at gunpoint: Find out how a JMU grad dealt with being shot.”

Around the same time, a roommate in student government, Terry Harrison, submitted a bill in favor of changing the mascot. In response, a group of students started a petition to save the Duke Dog and submitted a legislative proposal to prevent this semiotic coup from happening. In a wonderfully absurd display of ridiculousness, the marching band spelled out “We Love the Duke Dog” in their tubas and wore plastic dog bones around their necks during that year’s homecoming game. Fight the

power. Down with the pigs. During the game someone threw an effigy of a three-eyed pig with antlers into the stands and the crowd ripped it to shreds. One conversation overheard at the game: “Why are they ripping that stuffed animal to shreds?” “Some fags are trying to change the mascot to a three-eyed pig with antlers.” “Oh.”

What to do next? Well, a rally, of course, planned on Halloween, 1991, my 21st birthday. To ensure a high profile for the event, I officiated a mass wedding ceremony where I married about one hundred people to bananas. Two television stations showed up to cover the event, and one story was broadcast on all NBC affiliates in the state of Virginia. I found out later that the footage was incorporated into a CNN story about opposition to racially offensive mascots like the Washington Redskins and the Atlanta Braves.

Although quite a few people picked up on the fact that this was a joke, a lot more became quite angry, making me the target of many harassing phone calls and a couple cases of vandalism.

After the rally and the ensuing television coverage, the largest regional paper, the *Roanoke Times & World News*, ran a front-page story on the whole affair. During an interview with the reporter, I lied as much as possible to see what they would print without fact-checking. I made up the existence of a Nancy X, a fictional woman who supposedly invented Dukie while sitting naked at a party while tripping on LSD, and casually spun a ludicrous



story about the origins of the antlered three-eyed pig (“I mean, of course everybody knows that the three-eyed pig with antlers was a pagan symbol of sexuality.”) *The Roanoke Times & World News* casually explained, “Nancy X—who prefers to keep her identity hidden, although apparently nothing else—proposed a regular two-eyed pig with antlers, a pagan symbol of fertility and sexuality. But another faction wanted a three-eyed clown, so they compromised.”

Why did I go through all this trouble? Well, it was a class project and I received three credits toward my B.S. degree (rad!). It was also a critique of mass media. First, news outlets gave broad coverage to a trivial event when there were plenty of politically explosive issues that were either downplayed or ignored. Second, media can, in effect, make real something that is a complete fabrication. Think about what I could do—a relatively unsophisticated college student with no money and a little free time on his hands—and then compare it to the resources available to lobbying organizations and large corporations.

KEMBREW MCLEOD

This past presidential election year I voted via absentee ballot, because I was moving. I mailed in my ballot and everything seemed OK. But come election day, I received a letter at my new address informing me that my absentee ballot would not be counted because the ballot was not initialed by county election officials. The letter says that I would have to fill out the enclosed new ballot and send it back. I called up my county election office and asked, “If I mail this new ballot to you today, will it be counted?” The official said yes, so I did.

Later that night, after the returns

came in and Bush won, I look up the Nebraska state web site, and read the laws concerning absentee ballots. I discover that my ballot will not be counted because it will have arrived

a day late. I would have gone 20 miles back and voted in person had I known. So I write a letter to the county office asking them if my ballot counted. They eventually tell me no. I then write a letter to every elected state official, including then-Governor Mike Johanns and the Nebraska Secretary

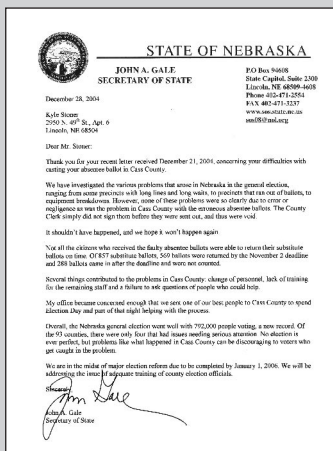
of State. All of the letters I get back are nice enough, but I’m basically S.O.L.

At this point I’m mad, and I feel pretty helpless. But I have saved all of the letters from local, county, and state officials regarding my voting problems, and so I decide to sell three of them on eBay. I write a very patriotic and heart warming description, list the items, and email various bloggers to let them know about the auction.

By the next night, I start getting bids, then I start getting emails from local newspapers and radio stations. I’m shocked. I do phone interviews with the *Lincoln Journal Star*, the *Omaha World Herald*, and KFAB. The *Journal Star* put me on the front page of the paper the next day. The reporter I talk to from the *Journal Star* has interviewed someone from the Cass County election office as well, so they know about what I have done personally. At this point, I have gotten my revenge.

I ended up selling my letters for \$30 to someone in San Francisco, who was giving them to her mom, a county election office employee. She said her mom is going to frame the letters and display them in her office as a reminder of how important her job is to the foundations of democracy. I gave the profits from the sale to the Nebraska Green Party.

KYLE STONER



I’ve always had a great deal of animosity toward student governments. Something about the kids who actively seek out that mix of petty authority and soul-crushing tedium has always made me harbor callow desires to cause them, and the student organizations they represent, harm.

I got my opportunity to stick it to student governments in my senior year of high school, back in the heady days of 1989. As a senior, I was ineligible to run for office, something I had always done out of a perverse sense of spite. I hadn’t paid too much attention to the entire student election process until a fortuitous event left me alone in the school library with the Apple that the election ballots were being created on. Using my incredible hacking skills (looking around to see I was alone, then typing) I added the made-up name “Arthur Corrino” to the ballot. Then I saved the file.

I figured they’d proofread the ballot and delete the new name. I figured wrong. The next morning I recieved, in my capacity as one of the school paper editors, the list of student body presidential candidates. On the list, of course, was my ethereal pal Arthur. Being a dutiful editor, I made sure that Arthur’s name ran in the paper, and, for good measure, gave him a quote in the associated article.

Since things had progressed this far, I decided what the hell, may as well go all out. I proceeded to make as many posters as my El Markos would allow. I plastered them all over the school, hellbent on making Arthur Corrino the first name anyone associated with student body president. Then, for good measure, I convinced one of the hipper teachers (Mr. Allen, the long-haired Latin teacher who frequented the teacher’s smoking lounge) to arrange for a student from another high school to come and give a speech on the day of the election.

Things were progressing very well. In the idealized scenario I played out

repeatedly in my head, Arthur would deliver a rousing speech, win the hearts and minds of the students, all of whom would wonder why they didn't know this dashing prince of a rising senior, and would soon find himself president of the student body. Then, his sudden disappearance would send shockwaves throughout the school, and the student government—shaken, humiliated, and broken—would be disbanded forever.

What actually happened was that a secret cabal formed of the current student government, that bitch Kate Peymiourou, and my big mouth conspired to reveal the true status of Mr. Corrino. I soon found my ass in the principal's office. Fortunately, I was able to see the storm clouds brewing the day before and came clean with my parents, who found the whole situation pretty funny, especially since I was already accepted to college and none of

this really mattered anyway.

In the end, I got in-school suspension and discovered a new folk-hero status. As I tromped over campus, tearing down all my posters and picking up other trash, attired in my homemade prison garb, students cheered as I walked past their windows. Though the effort was ultimately a failure, a blow against the growing tide of dipshittery had been struck. So, as far as I'm concerned, I won.

JASON TORCHINSKY

In the course of publishing *Stay Free!*, I've done a number of political pranks, but I'll not recount those. Instead, here's a personal one.

Years ago, there was a spate of LOST PET photos near my place in Park Slope. A couple of them went to lengths to describe the personality of the

animal, which stuck me as funny—as if someone who comes across a similar-looking cat is going to say, “Gee, I can't tell if this is the same Fluffy—let's see if he likes his belly rubbed.”

When I came across yet another lost pet ad for a bird (a bird!), I decided a parody was in order. So I created a flyer for my LOST CHIMP and posted it all over the neighborhood. For the contact info, I listed my friend Alexandra, along with her phone number.

Bad idea. In our years of friendship, Alexandra and I had never once fought, but she was pissed. Apparently, she got a number of calls from the flyer—mostly teen pranksters, but also a concerned zoologist and a creepy message by a guy who read the ad as a sort of subliminal personal (he wanted to go out). Alexandra was afraid to answer her phone for a week, and it was my fault. So that was my first—and last—practical joke.

CARRIE McLAREN

LOST CHIMP



Male, 11, named Mouse but answers to Josie, Krueger, Calvin, Kustard King, and Maslow. LOVES peanut butter. Grayish patches behind ears. Lengthy scar just above his right elbow (long story). Please help me find my Precious! Call Alexandra [REDACTED]. Serious inquiries only.

When I was 12 or so, my nerd girlfriend group was hanging out in the camper my friend Roxanne's family kept parked in their backyard. (Yup, right on the lawn.) We were playing with a Ziriya board, a 1970s relic I'd found at the outlet store. It was like a Ouija board, but you contacted the spirit world via a funny yellow plastic hand. Well, everyone except our friend Sue knew that Roxanne's mom had agreed to pull the camper's power cord out of the garage wall at exactly midnight. Sue also did not know that Roxanne and I had elaborately rigged the camper with multiple lengths of fishing line earlier in the night. I can't remember exactly what we made the board say, but I know we timed the spirit's arrival in the camper to coincide with the power loss. Everything went pitch black and we started yanking on the fishing lines under the table. The curtains jumped, things flew across the room, and the cupboard doors slammed

CONTINUED ON PAGE 55

REPORT FROM IRON MOUNTAIN

How a 1960s government conspiracy defended the world against a “sudden outbreak of peace.”

On December 5, 2002, Bigfoot died. So did Ray L. Wallace, the Seattle man who rented the gorilla suit and filmed a few grainy seconds that fueled Sasquatch-addled kids all over the world for decades. As sad as I was to see Bigfoot go, it was a valuable lesson about hoaxes: they often die when the perpetrator fesses up.

Except in the case of *Iron Mountain*. This story, unlike Bigfoot, has managed to be resistant to such hoax poisons as confession and truth. And though never quite as contagious as furry, seven-foot-tall apemen, aliens, or sunken treasure, the tale is a remarkable one.

In September 1966, Dial Press, a division of Simon & Schuster, published *Report from Iron Mountain on the Possibility and Desirability of Peace*. According to book's introduction, written by one Leonard C. Lewin, the report was the result of secret meetings that the United States government held to assess the consequences of entering a prolonged period of peace. The prospect of peace may have seemed unlikely at the time, given that the Vietnam War was escalating. Yet the experts were apparently concerned enough to hold meetings on and off for two and a half years. One of the experts—an anonymous John Doe—decided to leak the report, sharing its controversial conclusions with the public. The key finding: due to the inextricable links between the U.S. military and the global economy, peace was untenable and undesirable. In short, the report concluded, the world needs war.

In annotated, scholarly language, the authors employed the hyperrational logic of free-market think tanks: “War has provided both ancient and modern societies with a dependable system for stabilizing and controlling national economies.”

And: “‘War’ is virtually synonymous with nationhood. The elimination of war implies the inevitable elimination of national sovereignty and the traditional nation state.”

To protect against an epidemic of peace, the officials recommended establishing institutions to mimic the economic function of war, namely: “(a) A comprehensive social-welfare program, directed toward maximum improvement of general conditions of human life. (b) A giant open-end space research program, aimed at unreachable targets. (c) A permanent, ritualized, ultraelaborate disarmament inspection system, and variant of such a system.”

The problem with these solutions, however, was that—

except for the space program—these were attainable goals. Once a goal is met, it ceases to be the perpetual drain on resources that society needs. So the report also recommended that the government invent “alternate enemies”—threats from aliens, for example, or catastrophic global pollution. Or, better yet, the experts suggested, “socially oriented blood games” done “in the manner of the Spanish Inquisition and the witch trials of other periods.”

The success of *Report from Iron Mountain* can be measured by the fact that very important people believed it was genuine. It wasn't. After sales of the report skyrocketed and government officials panicked, Leonard Lewin eventually came clean as the author in a 1972 article in the *New York Times Book Review*.

Lewin had plenty of help. John Kenneth Galbraith was in on the joke and wrote a review of the book under a pseudonym for *Book World*. Victor Navasky, publisher emeritus of the *Nation*, gave Lewin the idea after reading a *New York Times* report about the stock market dipping because of a “peace scare.” Lewin and Navasky took the report to E. L. Doctorow, editor of Dial Press, who agreed to publish it as nonfiction.

Despite Lewin's very public confession, ultra-right fringe groups to this day believe the report is real. A quick search on the web will uncover a mess of them. Texe Marrs' *Power of Prophecy* web site, for example, represents a far-right Christian group that condemns the *Left Behind* series of novels as instruments of the devil. Amidst thinly veiled anti-Semitic tracts and warnings of the coming “Sovietization” of America, Marrs discusses the report, which is available on audiocassette to his legions of nervous, nervous fans.

In some ways, the *Report from Iron Mountain*, with its indictment of callow think-tank logic and its eventual descent into absurdity, is as relevant today as ever. But beneath the prank's political commentary is another implicit message: if you have a prank that's just barely plausible but hits a social nerve, you can ride it for a very long time. And that's an achingly beautiful—if scary—thing. ■

Based on (and partially plagiarized from) information provided by the Museum of Hoaxes.



**LINCO ADVERT
GOES HERE**

Media Virus

How silly videos and email pranks created the Bored at Work Network. Social networking guru Jonah Peretti explains.



ANDREA HARNER

If you've ever forwarded a video of people "crying while eating" to friends, or spent hours in the office reading knitting blogs, you know about the Bored at Work Network (BWN), whether you realize it or not. As defined by Jonah Peretti, BWN is the largest alternative to corporate media, with a base of millions of activists, temp workers, and salarymen. Though its participants come from all walks of life, they share one thing: they've got internet connections at work, and they are bored. • Jonah Peretti has championed the BWN—and the "contagious media" that fuels it—as both participant and creator. During his own workday at Eyebeam Art and Technology Center, he has made a mission of understanding how things spread online. Part sociologist, part propagandist, and part entrepreneur, Peretti has taught New York University students about social networks and helped progressive causes use the internet to expand their reach. • I first heard of Peretti after someone forwarded me an email he had sent to Nike. The company had just launched a product that allowed buyers to customize shoes by stitching a word on them, and Peretti asked for shoes bearing the word "sweatshop." When a Nike customer rep rejected Peretti's request, he compiled the email back-and-forth and sent it out to friends, who sent it out to their friends, and so on, ultimately crossing the globe. • Peretti (with his sister Chelsea) followed up the Nike email with the hilarious and much loved *Black People Love Us*—a site poking fun at liberal white racism—and the Rejection Line, a phone number people can give out to unsavory characters who hit on them. Perhaps his best known project, however, is the (Arianna) *Huffington Post*, a lefty news and commentary blog he cofounded. —Carrie McLaren

STAY FREE!: When did you first start to think about the Bored at Work Network?

JONAH PERETTI: Around the time of my Nike “sweatshop” email. I was getting email from people around the world, and all of them seemed to be receiving and forwarding it during the workday. I would get emails from Californians in the afternoons, from Australians late at night, and from Europeans while I slept.

STAY FREE!: You organized the Contagious Media Showdown as a contest for online projects. Can you predict what’s going to spread?

PERETTI: We didn’t have to. We had a hundred entries, so it was more a matter of watching what emerged. In a way, that’s a microcosm of the internet itself, where there are millions of people doing things, and the vast majority of them don’t spread. When something does spread, it’s unexpected. It’s easier to detect when something is starting to spread or to recognize the beginnings of a trend than to predict something out of a hundred things that will do well.

STAY FREE!: But the mission of both the contest and your contagious media class was to purposefully make something spread.

PERETTI: Yes, and that’s an increasingly popular way of thinking about something that is usually random. A designer makes a dancing baby and is completely taken aback that it spreads everywhere. Or a silly video circulates all over the web. Much of that is completely unintentional. But now people are thinking, “How do we do this intentionally?” It’s still more an art than a science. Big, multinational corporations haven’t

put much money into it because it’s not predictable.

STAY FREE!: But I thought they had, with viral marketing. What about Burger King, for instance?

PERETTI: They have the subservient chicken, but Burger King spent so much less on that than they do on ad buys. Large corporations want to be able to predict outcomes.

STAY FREE!: But you can’t predict print advertising well either. One of the reasons marketers like online advertising is that they can measure—if not exactly predict—the results. Also, it’s a lot cheaper than a 30-second spot on CBS.

PERETTI: Online advertising is increasingly popular, but that’s different than viral marketing. Companies want to target particular demographic groups. With viral marketing, things spread on their own, so you have no way of knowing if you’re reaching your target. Whereas, if you buy a print ad you can select a magazine that caters to the demographic you want.

I never thought *Black People Love Us* would get passed around on white power groups; they thought the site was outrageous because there were black people and white people in the same house drinking wine together. I got cell phone calls in the middle of the night from hardcore racists saying they were going to find me and kill me. The site wasn’t intended to attract that audience. It was directed to progressive hipsters who don’t realize how insensitive some of their actions are.

STAY FREE!: Did you learn anything from the Showdown, in terms of how things spread?

PERETTI: Generally, if you show people a project and they immediately want to tell someone about it, there’s a good chance it will be contagious. If the initial reaction is unenthusiastic, those things usually aren’t contagious.

STAY FREE!: The one site from your students that sticks with me most is WhatIsVictoriasSecret.com.

PERETTI: Yeah, it’s number two when you search for Victoria’s Secret on Google.

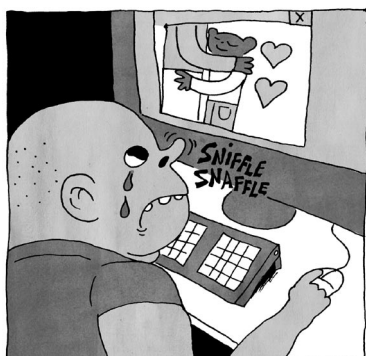
STAY FREE!: I love that Victoria’s Secret couldn’t go after them.

PERETTI: But they *did*—

STAY FREE!: The lawyer told them to take down the direct links to the real Victoria’s Secret site to make sure they didn’t confuse users, right?

PERETTI: Yes, but initially they called and said to take the site down immediately. A guy who worked on the site got the call and took it down, but the women working with him put it back up. The Victoria’s Secret lawyer called back begging, “Could you go after Calvin Klein or Frederick’s of Hollywood instead?” But when they asked the lawyer to send a cease-and-desist, she refused to put anything in writing: “I don’t want that showing up on the web.” She didn’t want the story to be about Victoria’s Secret trying to shut down a site that girls created about body image. The site had already gotten some press and they didn’t want it to get more.

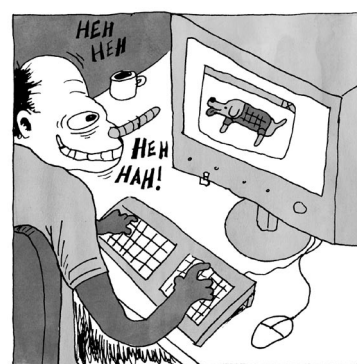
STAY FREE!: The winner of the Showdown was the site for Forget-Me-Not Panties, fake high-tech underwear that supposedly tracks whether your wife is cheating. I read



AUTO TECHNICIAN



ARCHITECT



OFFICE ASSISTANT

KYLE PELLET

that blogs helped spread the panties site but that foreign newspaper and radio coverage brought the most traffic. Do you know if any of these media mistook it for real?

PERETTI: I don't know about, say, the Japanese sites. But, yes, a lot of web sites mistook it for real.

STAY FREE!: That site does seem to combine traits that are popular on many blogs: it's sex-related, it's a high-tech gadget that appeals directly to males, and it's an idea that can transcend cultural boundaries.

PERETTI: As my friend Duncan Watts has said, people often have very detailed explanations for why things spread *after the fact*. But before, when a panel of experts and the audience were voting, nobody picked the panties site to win. The panel and the audience responded to all of the top sites except the one that won the grand prize.

But back to your question about what drives visitors. The rise of blogging and of contagious media happened around the same time, so there's a sense that if something gets on the blogs, it becomes contagious. But blogs don't send as much traffic as you might expect. Blogs are important because they can lead to the next stage of media. Reporters read blogs, and if a project winds up in a news story, it could bring

ten times the amount of traffic. Of course, news sites that don't have a strong online presence don't send as much traffic. The *Blogebrity* site got a sidebar in *Newsweek* and didn't even get a blip.

STAY FREE!: I've noticed that with *Stay Free!*, a mention in the *New York Times* might do nothing, but a good mention on *Boing Boing* or NPR will get us thousands of hits.

PERETTI: It could be that the NPR and *Boing Boing* audiences are the kind of people who'd like *Stay Free!*, so you get a better response rate from them.

STAY FREE!: Have you gotten better at predicting things?

PERETTI: I think so. With the Show-down, people had a sense of what would do well but didn't know what the winner would be. And that's generally the case with all information economies, whether it is software or video games, movies—anything where word of mouth can result in a cascade where popularity begets popularity. There's a book called *Hollywood Economics*, which basically argues that you can predict the things that will break even. But predicting huge hits is almost impossible because hits are rare and require people telling their friends about a movie. Those things aren't very pre-

dictable. And so the majority of the studios' revenue comes from something they can't predict well. *Titanic* probably brought more than half of the profits of the studio from that year, yet everyone thought it was going to be a flop.

That said, there are some things you can do to help something be contagious. You can make sure your content is linkable, and not trapped in Flash or frames.

STAY FREE!: Visual things seem to work well too because they're not tied to a specific language and are more accessible to international audiences.

PERETTI: There are two opposing things that need to be in the project. One, it needs to be somehow provocative or shocking. It has to be new in some way. And, two, it has to be broadly appealing enough that you want to send it to your whole address book. One reason I think JibJab did well was it made fun of both Democrats and Republicans; if it were left or right it would have had a more limited audience.

STAY FREE!: I thought JibJab was edgeless, though. There should be a bored-at-home network for people like my parents who send that kind of stuff. They circulate whole different genres of things: religious stories and cards.

PERETTI: I've seen some religious emails that ask people to pray for a kid dying of cancer, which is unusual. In general, things with a sad message don't spread well.

STAY FREE!: Contagious projects are often ephemeral. They're all over the net one week, then vanish. Why is that?

PERETTI: That's partly because things that have a lasting impact stop seeming like contagious media. Hot or Not, for example, started as a joke but spread, and now it's a real business, a dating service. Companies have set up rejection lines in dozens of cities, selling advertising. So some things will transform into a useful tool. Hotmail was like that. It used to be super contagious: "Free email? That's crazy!" At the bottom of every email it said, "Get your own free email."

Also, you've got to keep in mind the social dynamics of how things spread. If you post things that people have already seen, that's considered lame. And so there's an incentive to post things when they're fresh and a disincentive to post things when they're old. And that dynamic shortens the lifespan of these things.

STAY FREE!: Blogs have replaced zines as the main underground form of self-publishing, but I think the ways they differ are revealing. I remember when *The Zine Guide* launched a survey that ranked zines—like Top 10 charts. I was really annoyed by it; ranking seemed antithetical to zines. But in the blog world, there's a big emphasis on stats, on rank. I'm as guilty as anyone—I check our stats obsessively and look at who is linking to us. Anyway, I just wonder if you have any thoughts on this shift in focus toward process and popularity.

PERETTI: When I taught the contagious media class at NYU, I would always tell my students that being interesting and thought-provoking isn't necessarily correlated with being popular. But the purpose of this class wasn't to create something interesting and thought-provoking, it was to create contagious media—and some of the students hated that. Personally, I like that it gives you a metric for success you don't otherwise have in the art or design world.

STAY FREE!: But what about outside the classroom? The average creative writer...

PERETTI: If you value having an impact and reaching a large number of people, you have a benchmark for doing a good job. That being said, there are all the obvious downsides of focusing on ratings and popularity.

STAY FREE!: We think of blogs as alternative media, yet the idea that what's good equals what's popular is a very market-centric one.

PERETTI: I think the left has had a problem in being anti-popularity. I don't come from an indie music background, where you love a band until they sell out by becoming popular. I'm somewhat sympathetic to that perspective—which is similar to the left-wing activist perspective—but I worry that thinking of popularity as bad is a good way to lose. If you're trying to have an impact in the world and achieve certain goals, being popular is a good thing. Of course, it shouldn't be an end in itself.

STAY FREE!: Let's talk a bit about Stanley Milgram. Most people know him as the social scientist whose experiments showed that

WORLD O' JONAH

A SHORT LIST OF HIS PROJECTS

NIKE SWEATSHOP EMAIL

A global email forward chronicling Nike's refusal to print the word "sweatshop" on a pair of shoes.

BLACK PEOPLE LOVE US

A satirical home page by two twenty-something white people bragging about having black friends. Co-created with Chelsea Peretti.



FUNDRACE

Co-created by Mike Frumin, the site allows the public to see the political contributions of neighbors, business owners, and celebrities.

THE REJECTION LINE



Someone won't leave you alone? Give them your number: 212-479-7990. The caller

is officially rejected and has the opportunity to speak to a comfort specialist, hear a sad poem from a kindred spirit, or cling to the unrealistic hope that a relationship is still possible. Millions of people have used this comedic service by Jonah and Chelsea Peretti.

FORWARD TRACK

This collaboration with Mike Frumin is a social network platform that tracks and maps the diffusion of email forwards, political calls-to-action, and online petitions, with the goal of helping people understand the power of decentralized networks.

the impulse to obey authority was so great, people would administer life-threatening electric shocks to test subjects. But he did some pioneering work in social networking as well.

PERETTI: Milgram coined the term “six degrees of separation” and wrote a paper called “Small Worlds,” which describes a 1970s experiment involving a group of people in the Midwest and a target person in Boston. He created a chain letter that said, “There’s a stockbroker in Boston and we’re trying to get this letter to him. If you know him, send it directly to him, but if you don’t, send it to someone more likely to know him.”

Before he did the experiment, Milgram asked various colleagues to make a prediction, and most of them estimated it would take dozens or even hundreds of jumps. Well, it turned out that it took on average six jumps to get to this guy in Boston. People would say, “Oh, I know someone on the East Coast,” or, “I know a stockbroker so I’ll send it to him.” And with each jump, the letter got closer. This is where the phrase comes from.

STAY FREE!: Going back to teaching, have any of your students gone into making contagious media professionally?

PERETTI: A couple have. And I’ve done some consulting projects. Oxygen was launching a women’s television program called *Good Girls Don’t* and I came up with the idea to have one of the characters on the show write her own blog. The blog ended up doing better than the program.

STAY FREE!: For the Contagious Media Show at the New Museum, you and your sister Chelsea hired

performers to chat up visitors, who weren’t aware that these people were working for you. Do you have any personal rules or ethical guides for using duplicity in your work?

PERETTI: Hmmm.

STAY FREE!: Let me give you a personal example. Charles [*Stay Free!* vice president] and I were thinking about making an anti-Wal-Mart video and spreading it online. I thought if we could stage something somewhat shocking—like a Wal-Mart manager beating a Mexican worker—people who don’t usually read about Wal-Mart’s business practices might see it and talk about it...and maybe it would help open some eyes. On the other hand, it’s kind of disgusting to resort to something like that. I’m just curious where you draw the line, and if this question has ever come up for you.

PERETTI: There are different kinds of duplicity, and I think it depends on what you’re trying to achieve. There’s the duplicity of [notorious pranksters] the Yes Men, where you’re creating a fake identity and doing a critical performance to make people think about something that they might not have thought about. There are some politics in it but I think it’s more effective as art. I’m not convinced that creating fake hoaxes helps specific political causes; the results are hard to predict and can have the opposite of the desired effect.

A second kind of duplicity is more politically strategic. I was sitting at a table with high-level progressives and one consultant said, “Here’s what you do: ask a survey question ten different ways. Poll each of the ways and find out which one gives you an 80/20 split in your favor. Then do another poll where you just ask the question that favors

your position. Finally, you send the results to every member of Congress and say, “It’s 80 percent against you. We’re going to bring the voters out in force in the next election if you don’t support this cause.”

That’s a form of duplicity that can often be effective in pushing policy, whether it’s the NRA or People for the American Way. It’s effective but not particularly honest.

Those are two kinds of duplicity I’m familiar with and have participated in. One of them provokes people to think about the world differently; the other plays into people’s assumptions and reaffirms them.

STAY FREE!: And you don’t feel bad about that? So what’s the difference between a lefty group that uses a deceptive tactic and, say, the Swift Boat Veterans campaign? When do the ends justify the means?

PERETTI: People have their own personal limits, and it tends to be more visceral than rigorous. I tend to not do hoaxes or pranks that are designed to trick people. Maybe I don’t have the balls for it, but I could never do the kind of thing that the Yes Men do.

STAY FREE!: You’d have to be a good actor.

PERETTI: And I’m not comfortable lying to people. The people behind Forget Me Not Panties were able to mislead reporters, but I’ve never done that.

STAY FREE!: Someone at Eyebeam created a site intended to fool people, and you ended up getting personally sued for it. Can you talk about that?

PERETTI: Um, no.

STAY FREE!: Okay, never mind.

What's Forward Track? Could you talk a little about it?

PERETTI: When I did the Nike email, there was no way to tell how many people had received it. The idea of Forward Track is to track email forwards. You could see that one person sent the email to ten people. The first project was Tom Mauser's petition to prevent the ban on assault weapons from being repealed.

STAY FREE!: Do you collect the email addresses of each person?

PERETTI: Initially, Forward Track worked entirely through email, but people were confused by it. They were more accustomed to visiting a web page and signing a petition, like they do for MoveOn. So we came up with a web version. Since then, there have been a dozen campaigns using Forward Track. It allows you to track emails on both a geographic map and a social network map.

STAY FREE!: What kind of issues is it being used for?

PERETTI: Oxygen did one for women's advocacy issues. One group used it for East Indian bone marrow donors. People for the American Way did one for the Supreme Court. Procter & Gamble did one for the launch of Tide Cold Water.

STAY FREE!: P&G, really? Was that something you engineered?

PERETTI: Forward Track is open-source software, so anybody can use it. But we did work with them, and it was an interesting opportunity to see how the software scales, because Procter & Gamble has email lists of millions of people. They said their response rate was ten times higher than any other campaign they had done, though people on the list were still much less likely to send an email about Tide than they would a politically targeted message.

STAY FREE!: Does the fact that this big corporation is using your software to send spam bother you?

PERETTI: Working with corporations has been interesting. I have spent most of my adult life working in schools, research labs, or nonprofits. And I've realized that a lot of things I thought about corporations are not 100 percent accurate. In terms of privacy issues, Procter & Gamble is much stricter than any of the political organizations I work with. They wouldn't show us any email addresses—they had to anonymize all of them. They had double opt-in and strict rules against spam. An activist group could never afford that level of privacy protection. Partly it's

because Procter & Gamble has the resources to do it.

STAY FREE!: Last I checked, Procter & Gamble was the largest advertiser in America.

PERETTI: They have email lists of people who genuinely want information about new products. People subscribe to newsletters for home-keeping tips. People care about the products these big corporations make. I always think about open source and the mission, but it's possible that just as many people care about detergent. Wikipedia has lots of people contributing for free because it's a good cause. And MySpace, the social networking site, also has people who contribute content for free. Both sites are among the most popular on the internet. One of them is non-commercial and one of them just sold for over \$500 million. Some people don't really care whether they are contributing their labor or time to a commercial enterprise or a nonprofit.

STAY FREE!: MySpace may be commercial, but it's not detergent. I don't think people care much about detergent. A lot of people may be on the P&G list because they are bargain hunters.

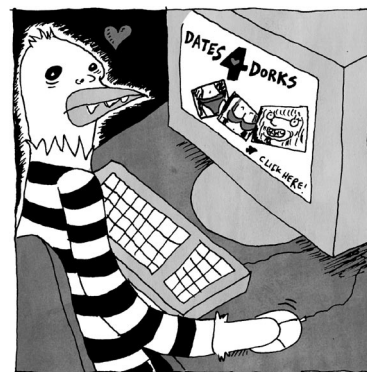
With Forward Track, were



FOOD DESIGNER



COMPUTER PROGRAMMER



PROSTITUTE

KYLE PELLET

you ever concerned about privacy issues? I don't know that I would want any group to know who I'm sending things to. I'm inclined to think we benefit from the anarchy of the web, in contrast to, say, a political sphere dominated by public opinion polls and all kinds of focus groups.

PERETTI: Do you mean that as a critique of MoveOn?

STAY FREE!: No, I'm just playing devil's advocate against contagious media analysis in general.

PERETTI: Okay, but MoveOn is a good example. They are a progressive organization, but, to build a movement, they think numerically: "If we write about this hot-button issue and send this out to our list, we'll get X many new subscribers." Their power and influence is based on the size of their list.

The idea behind Forward Track is to give ordinary people access to data that only MoveOn would see otherwise. It gives you a visual of how people are connected. Our theory was that if more people could see how their individual efforts created a larger movement, they might become more active participants.

There are two ways you can address privacy concerns. One way is to pass strict laws outlawing the sharing of information. Forward

Track takes the opposite approach, which is to make the information open so that privacy becomes less of a concern because government and large corporations don't control everything. When information is open, it's harder to manipulate people with it.

Fundrace is another example; that data already existed, but you had to have an engineer process it. And so a political campaign or a corporation could use it, but nobody else could. Fundrace allowed anyone with an internet connection to search that info. I think making things easy and accessible benefits people with less resources.

STAY FREE!: But even if everyone has access, some people are going to be better able to take advantage and profit from the information than others. Knowledge isn't necessarily neutral.

PERETTI: If you look at all the stuff being passed around the web, most of it isn't marketing. I'd be interested in doing an analysis of what percentage is paid for by a company and what percentage is just kids fooling around.

STAY FREE!: Do you ever wrestle with the question of forbidden knowledge? I'm inclined to think that the lack of predictability is a *good* thing. Maybe there are some

things we don't want to know about what makes things spread, because if there was a way to control how something spreads . . .

PERETTI: [laughs] You make it sound like I'm creating the neutron bomb!

STAY FREE!: If corporations can map our social connections, what's to stop them from working on breaking them?

PERETTI: Well, corporations have already figured out ways to influence social interactions. For example, web sites place related links at the footer of a web story to increase recirculation and page views. Built-in tools for emailing or IMing a friend increase the chance that you will send your peers to a company's web site. And Google gets you to click on sponsored links by matching them with your searches and only showing ads that have performed well with other people.

But we are at the very beginning of understanding how this works. Part of why I am interested in contagious media is that there is still so much room for developing new techniques. I agree that some applications of this knowledge can be scary, but I enjoy working in morally ambiguous spaces. I find that is where most of the interesting stuff happens. ■



CANDY WHOLESALER



MEDICAL CLERK



LAWYER

KYLE PELLET

PRANK'D!

A
FEW OF OUR
RECENT FAVES,
COURTESY OF THE
BORED AT WORK
NETWORK.

Zug: Credit Card Security

John Hargrave believes that “credit card security” is an oxymoron and, in two simple pranks, set out to prove it.

In his first experiment, he tested how carefully retail clerks checked his signature when processing a credit card purchase. Eschewing his own name—or even a name at all—Hargrave “signed” with a variety of gibberish. He filled the signature area with a crosshatch pattern; he inserted a doodle of a smiling whale; and he once simply wrote “Please check ID”—all of which were mindlessly approved. His reign of terror continued unabated until he tried to sign “NOT AUTHORIZED” for \$15,000 in flat-screen TVs.

He then turned his attention to the security of account information. Do you really need to remember your mother’s maiden name when you want information from a phone operator? No, it turns out you do not. Hargrave set out to access his account while demonstrating little to no knowledge of the account. On his first attempt he simply used a fake maiden name (“Swarthington”). The operator resisted, until he indicated that the name was simply part of a longer, faker name.

HARGRAVE: That’s my mother’s maiden name, Swarthington-Stocktoston . . . Is that not what you have?

VISA: I don’t see that kind of information. Oh, okay . . . I got it. So you want to have a credit line increase?

Unfortunately, distracted by the ease of his progress, Hargrave started pestering the operator without obtaining any useful information. In fact, he became so infatuated with his own silliness that the call fell short of succeeding. The second time around he didn’t make the same mistake:

HARGRAVE: I need to make an inquiry about my balance.

VISA: All right, sir. In order to maintain security, may I please have your mother’s maiden name?

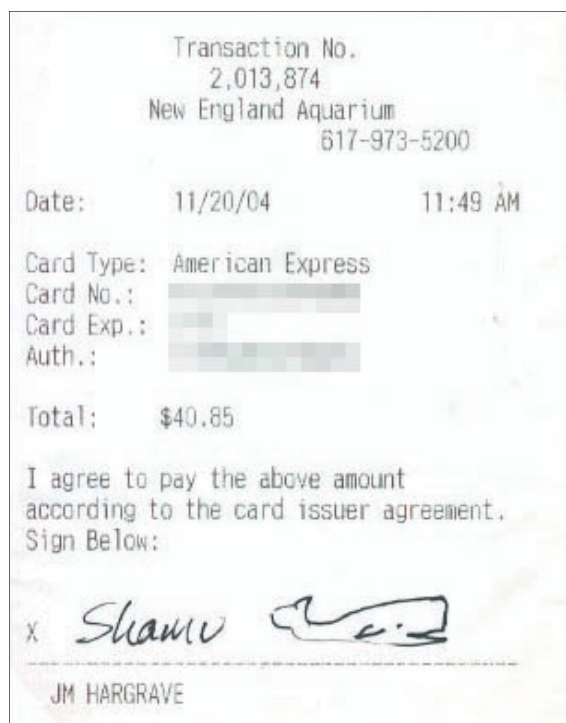
HARGRAVE: Yeah. That’s [*mumbles something unintelligible*].

VISA: [*Pause*] Okay, and how can I help you sir?

HARGRAVE: Um, can you tell me, uh, my current balance?

VISA: I show the current balance as . . . \$7,618.62.

Despite hearing nothing resembling a name at all, the operator not only gave up Hargrave’s balance, she then told him his mother’s maiden name—certainly something to think about if you are estranged from Mom but need to transfer a balance on short notice. (Zug.com)





Improv Everywhere: No Pants

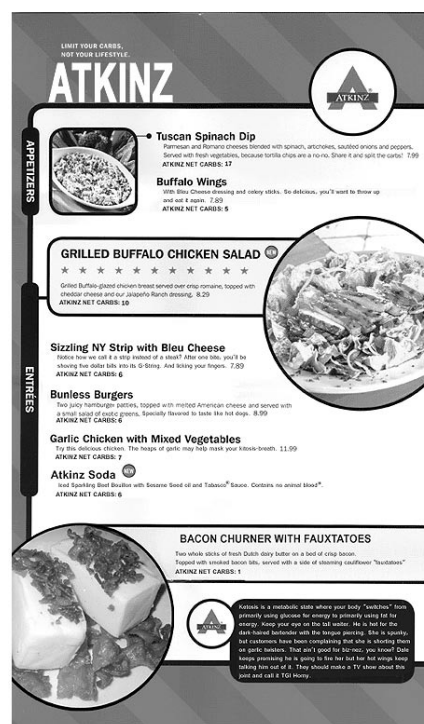
Improv Everywhere's Charlie Todd doesn't have a mean-spirited bone in his body. Normally that would result in a prank-free life, but Todd created a new style of prank—one that creates joy instead of embarrassment. For four years running, Todd has led his Improv Everywhere agents in No Pants: at an uptown subway stop, on a winter day, a rider enters the car without pants, acting like any other rider. With each subsequent stop, more pantsless riders enter the car, seemingly independent of each other. As the rider-to-pants ratio rapidly shrinks, and the civilians on the car start to get concerned, a vendor comes through the car—selling pants. For a dollar. And he has everyone's size.

Nobody gets hurt, everyone has a laugh and, despite the best efforts of the Office of Homeland Security, Improv Everywhere tapes the mission and posts dangerous pictures of our subway system on the internet. (ImprovEverywhere.com)

Cockeyed: Extreme Atkins

Rob Cockerham uses public, often commercial spaces to pull his pranks. A recurring theme is to replace banal icons with his own equally banal but slightly "off" projects.

Amused by the "fun" food descriptions on the T.G.I. Friday's menu, Rob Cockerham drafted colleagues to replace the Atkins-friendly menu in restaurants across the country with fake pages he designed. Substitute descriptions for real menu items (Buffalo wings are "[s]o delicious, you'll want to throw up and eat it again") sit alongside Cockerham creations like the Bacon Churner ("Two whole sticks of fresh Dutch dairy butter on a bed of crisp bacon. Topped with smoked bacon bits, served with a side of steaming cauliflower 'fauxtatoes'") and Atkinz Soda ("Iced Sparkling Beef Bouillon with Sesame Seed Oil and Tabasco™ Sauce"). (Cockeyed.com)



Banksy: Fake Archaeology



London-based graffiti artist Banksy has moved beyond public walls and turned to museums as the canvas for his work. He has hung his own paintings at the Tate Modern in London, and at the Met, MoMA, and Brooklyn Museum in New York. His best prank, however, was placing a fake cave painting that depicts a stick figure pushing a shopping cart ("Early Man Goes Shopping") in an exhibition at the British Museum. The cave painting sat undetected until he posted about it on his web site. The result? Banksy sent up the exclusivity of the art world by showing that artists with less renown can sit alongside recognized artists, and even the curators are unable to distinguish what they have approved from what they haven't. Of course, it probably doesn't hurt that Banksy is good enough for his art to belong in a museum. In fact, after the British Museum curators were tipped to the fake in their midst, they promoted the piece to their permanent collection. (banksy.co.uk)

Eugene Mirman: Telephone Morality

In 1996, as a joke, Brooklyn comic and *Stay Free!* contributor Eugene Mirman (page 42) made a nominal donation to Alan Keyes's presidential campaign, unaware that donating has the same effect as feeding a stray cat. After years of solicitations from the Republican Party and its affiliates, Mirman has now developed a twitching reaction every time the phone rings. Among the barrage of solicitors was United American Technologies, a phone company that defines itself not by low rates or easy-to-understand monthly statements, but by its *lone-wolf opposition to gay marriage* amid the immoral jungle of long-distance providers. Surprised by UAT's sales pitch, Mirman decided to go undercover and play along with them while he taped the call.

UAT TELEMARKETER: Okay, Eugene, did you press 1 to oppose same-sex marriages?

MIRMAN: Oh, I pressed it, yes.

UAT: Okay, that's great to hear. Now are you against same-sex marriage?

MIRMAN: Well, I want to destroy it, yes . . . with the fist of God, we will smash them!

UAT: Exactly. Mr. Mirman, our organization is dedicated to people such as yourself who want to stop same-sex marriages and to quit doing business with companies that promote and profit from the homosexual lifestyle.

Curious, Eugene prompted the operator to tell him how other companies promote homosexuality:

UAT: UAT is the only carrier taking an active stand against same-sex marriages and hardcore child pornography.

MIRMAN: AT&T sponsors child pornography?

UAT: No, no. That's MCI . . . They have a pedophile web site for men who love boys.

UAT is so comfortably homophobic that the operator didn't flinch at Mirman's increasingly hateful comments. I'm surprised they didn't offer him a job. (EugeneMirman.com)

transforming words into visual communication

Incipit is a design firm
whose practice is built upon letters.

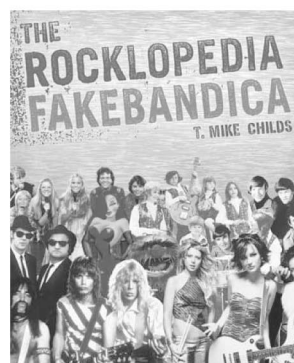
www.incipit.com
917-930-6380



- fun vintage toy earrings
- made-to-order vintage soda lamps
- probably more!



PUMPKIN DESIGNS • www.pumpkinplay.com



"...more than trivial..."
- Entertainment Weekly

the
**ROCKLOPEDIA
FAKEBANIDCA**
by T. Mike Childs

The ultimate reference for every band
that never was. Illustrated by and
contributed to by STAY FREE! regulars!

Available at independent
and not so independent
booksellers everywhere.



INDECENT EXPOSURE

The truth behind overpopulation, the Church of Euthanasia, and the Jerry Springer Show (or something like the truth)

I'm not camera shy, but if I'm going to be on camera, my first choice wouldn't be the *Jerry Springer Show*. So you might wonder how I ended up in a dominatrix outfit on the 1997 episode entitled "I Want to Join a Suicide Cult" with the Church of Euthanasia. It's not a bad question.

Here's a little known truth: the Church of Euthanasia is *not* a suicide cult. Or a society of man-eating, fetus-slaying demons. Yes, the members' "four pillars" are sodomy, suicide, abortion, and cannibalism. Yes, they give explicit directions about how best to cut and consume a human being on their web site. Yes, their slogan is "save the planet, kill yourself."

But the reality is that they have a serious motivation for doing and saying patently absurd stuff: the Church is a federally recognized educational organization that, through performance art, brings attention to the dangers of human overpopulation.

For example, a few months after the show aired, I helped them do a street action called "Take the Blindfold Challenge." We had a tray of two different kinds of meat and would invite passersby to try them both and tell us which one was human and which was not. The point was that humans are animals too. Think of a veal cow chained in a pen all its life, then imagine a human being smushed onto an overcrowded bus or

rotting away in a cubicle. In the past three hundred years, humans have decimated more than three hundred species, and we will wipe out half of those remaining in the next century if we don't learn how to share the earth.

But we were, of course, not serving human meat. We weren't even serving animal meat. Everything was vegetarian—fake, veggie soy stuff on toothpicks. Tofurkey, or something.

Anyway, the Church's concern with overpopulation is one that I share. I see population and environmental problems as inseparable. When I was younger and people would cry out in despair about an environmental issue like suburban sprawl, I would

think, "Well, if you have a lot of kids and you're complaining about suburban sprawl, you're being hypocritical."

The Church has only one commandment: "Thou shall not breed." I'm what you call "child free," which means I have no interest in personally contributing to the population problem. Let's just say I live by the Church's *Thank You for Not Breeding* slogan.

Until I met Chris Korda, I felt completely isolated by my views. He came to San Francisco to visit me after he saw some population comics I had published. I don't remember the details of the visit—just that it was nice to talk to another deep ecology freak.

Years passed without any contact, and then, out of the



blue, I get a call from Chris asking whether I would like to be on the *Jerry Springer Show*. My initial reaction was, “What’s the *Jerry Springer Show*?” I’d never heard of it. So I watched half an episode, which was enough to give me a good idea of what the show was like, and I thought, “Well, if I die without having done this then I’ll feel bad, so I better say yes.” And I did.

I didn’t really know much about what I was in for until I got to Chicago for the taping. Chris had mentioned that it was going to be a sort of point-counterpoint with some Christian evangelicals. He needed me on the show because the producers wanted a human interest story, and I was one of the only people he knew who might be crazy enough to do this.

I was supposed to play a wayward soul named Grace who was looking to join the Church. (In truth, I think I was “inducted into the Church” when I mailed them 10 dollars.) But my baby-obsessed boyfriend, Chuck—in reality, a gay friend of mine from San

Francisco—wants to stop me and win back my love. The only preparation I had to make was the costume. Chris knew I owned a dominatrix outfit and wanted me to wear it under conservative clothes, then break it out at a good time. That way, we might grab the attention of channel surfers.

When we got to the show, it became pretty clear, as we sat there getting makeup, that the producer knew we were a put-on. But our unspoken deal was that we weren’t going to come out and say this was a joke. In fact, we signed a contract saying that we wouldn’t talk about the show. So, we’re this completely absurd entity being treated as though we were a serious threat.

Jerry opens the show by asking the audience, “What would you do if someone you loved wanted to join a cult that supported suicide, cannibalism, and even eating the flesh of aborted babies?” Then, out marches Chris Korda, dressed in a short, black cocktail dress with a giant sperm painted on it; Pastor Kim in minister’s

garb holding a cross with a dangling rubber chicken; and Vermin X in a black ski mask, with an army fatigue bonnet.

The whole experience was totally ridiculous. There were so many points where we wanted to scream, “C’mon, it’s funny!” Like when Chris tries to lead the conservative audience in chanting “Eat Jerry! Eat Jerry! Eat Jerry!” Or when I’m explaining why I want to join the Church to “Chuck,” who has broken up with me because of my refusal to have children, and Vermin X brings out a vomiting baby doll and a coat hanger to help my point. Or when Jerry admits that his naked body would probably make him “the poster child against cannibalism.”

The editors cut out a lot. My cohorts had a pectin fetus, which they ate during the first segment, before I came on the show. And penis-shaped water pistols, which security guards would confiscate. Once they did, Vermin or Chris would pull out another from the prop box and start spraying each other or the audience. At one point, Vermin even

squirted anti-abortion nutcase Neil Horsley.

The editors also cut the part where I ripped off my dress the moment that the Christians walked onto the stage. (This prompted one of Horsley’s followers to remind me, with a tremble in her voice, that Jesus still loves me.)

Our tactic was to spread confusion, and we certainly did that. Serious messages were buried in there, and a lot of them came through because the confusion made it hard for the editors to know what to cut.

But I’m not going to lie: after the show was over, I felt terrible. I kept thinking, “Oh God, what have I done?” The first thing I did when I got back to San Francisco was just try to sleep the whole thing off and forget about it.

When the show finally aired a month later, my friends and I taped it and had a big party. And, to my surprise, even though the scenes where I’m at the edge of the stage screaming with the veins in my neck popping out are pretty embarrassing, the whole

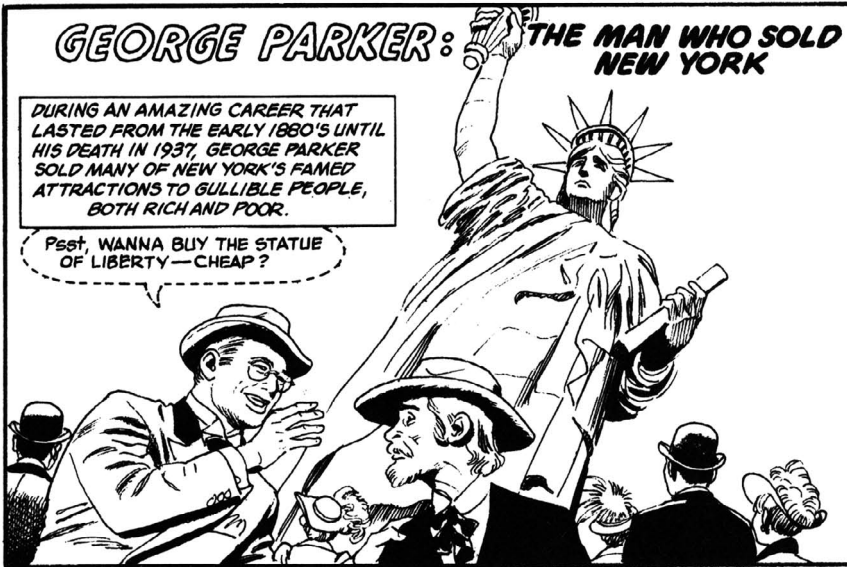
CONTINUED PAGE 53



GEORGE PARKER: THE MAN WHO SOLD NEW YORK

DURING AN AMAZING CAREER THAT LASTED FROM THE EARLY 1880'S UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1937, GEORGE PARKER SOLD MANY OF NEW YORK'S FAMED ATTRACTIONS TO GULLIBLE PEOPLE, BOTH RICH AND POOR.

PEET, WANNA BUY THE STATUE OF LIBERTY—CHEAP?



PARKER ESPECIALLY ENJOYED SELLING THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE. HE SOLD IT TWICE A WEEK FOR YEARS AFTER THE DAY IT OPENED IN 1883.

ENJOY YOUR BRIDGE.

BEST \$50,000 I EVER INVESTED!



PARKER HAD NUMEROUS METHODS OF SELLING THE FAMOUS STRUCTURE.

WANT TO WORK FOR ME COLLECTING TOLLS? I FIGURE I CAN COLLECT A PENNY EACH FOR VEHICLES AND PEDESTRIANS TO CROSS.



A PENNY! YOU OWN THE DAMN THING! WHY NOT CHARGE A NICKEL FROM SIGHTSEERS AND A DIME FOR CARRIAGES AND WAGONS!

I DUNNO. YOU THINK SO?



SURE! WHY, THE MONEY YOU'D MAKE! I'D BUY THE DAMN BRIDGE FROM YOU, IF I COULD.

I'D WANT \$5,000.



MY PAPPY'S LENDING ME HALF. I KIN RAISE THE REST IN SIX MONTHS.

ONCE YOU DO, YOU'LL BE IN THE BRIDGE BUSINESS.

JUST SIGN RIGHT THERE...



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE COUNTRY BUMPKIN WAS TYPICAL OF MANY OF PARKER'S GULLIBLE VICTIMS.

I TELL YOU I OWN THIS BRIDGE!

YES, LADDIE, AND I'M THE KING OF ENGLAND.



WHEN IT CAME TO SELLING PRESTIGIOUS NEW YORK REAL ESTATE, PARKER, IT SEEMED, WOULD TRY ANYTHING. HE EVEN OPENED AN OFFICE TO HANDLE THE TRANSACTIONS.



HIS CHOICES OF THINGS TO SELL VARIED. THERE WAS THE OLD MADISON SQUARE GARDEN--



--THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART--



--AND EVEN GRANT'S TOMB. IN SELLING THE MONUMENT, PARKER FREQUENTLY POSED AS GRANT'S SON OR GRANDSON.



PARKER ALSO CLAIMED HE HAD FOR YEARS RESISTED GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO CHARGE ADMISSION TO THE TOMB.



IN 1928, PARKER SOLD THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE TO THREE TEXANS WHO DISCOVERED THEY'D BEEN SCAMMED BY READING ABOUT ONE OF PARKER'S PREVIOUS FRAUDS.



PARKER WAS LUCKY THAT ALL THE TEXANS DID WAS GET HIM ARRESTED. BUT WITH THREE PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS, HE WAS CONSIDERED AN HABITUAL CRIMINAL, AND DREW A LIFE SENTENCE.



STILL, PARKER'S LAST NINE YEARS IN PRISON WERE NOT UNHAPPY ONES. BOTH GUARDS AND INMATES ENJOYED THE STORIES OF HIS CAPERS.



THE ORGANIZATION MAN

How far will a Starbucks employee go to please his fictitious boss?

In October 2004, Shizzy Joyce thought it'd be fun to try on a new identity: that of Starbucks CEO Orin C. Smith. Joyce has a column on the web site Bob from Accounting, in which he shares the joke emails he sends to companies, politicians, religious zealots. For this particular prank, Joyce secured an official-sounding domain name—starbuckcorp.com—and set up an email address as "CEO." He then looked over Starbucks' staff directory and found a victim: a new assistant in the human resources department, Roger Simmons. Here is an edited version of their exchange. For the full deal, see bobfromaccounting.com.

Mr. Simmons,

I just wanted to say hello and welcome you to the human resources department. Being an assistant is an important cog in the machinery that is our company, and I'm hopeful we will both benefit from your employment here. Obviously, as the CEO I am very busy and travel a good bit, but I do try to keep an open dialogue with all the employees. If there is anything you need, do not hesitate to write.

Best regards,

Orin C. Smith
[Shizzy Joyce]
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

Thank you. That's kind of you to write a personal note. I appreciate it.

Simmons

Dear Mr. Simmons,

I happened to be in human resources the other day, but you weren't at your post. I'm sorry I missed you but there are some new directives and I wanted to explain them personally to your group, including low-level new hires like yourself.

I did happen to notice a young man with brown hair and glasses that seemed to be spending a lot of time on the internet. I'm hoping that wasn't you.

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

No, I haven't been using the internet. I have dark hair, no glasses and a goatee.

Roger Simmons

Mr. Simmons,

Ms. Crisholm should have told you how we feel about facial

hair. While I realize goatees may be considered stylish, we ask that men refrain from wearing them in our corporate offices. Unfortunately, there's little we can do about the appearance of our counter people. I certainly wish this weren't the case, because most of them have absolutely no loyalty to our brand, and they have done nothing but tarnish our image. I hope you understand. Please have it removed by Monday.

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

I've only met Ms. Crisholm once. She's not my direct boss. My direct boss is Angie Tweed. I'm sorry about the goatee, I didn't know it was a problem. There is another man with a beard so I thought it was okay. I do apologize and I have already shaved it.

Roger Simmons

Don't worry about the other guy with the beard, it doesn't concern you. He is being terminated anyway for stealing.

I hope you don't mind this, but there are a few important issues that need to be resolved in the coming months and I may call upon you to assist me in some information-

gathering. This will be strictly requested by myself, and not through your immediate supervisors or their bosses. I realize this is unconventional but if you prove to be efficient and discreet, you may have a great future within our corporation.

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

Yes, absolutely. Just let me know if there is anything I can do. I am learning quickly and have the ability to be discreet when asked.

Roger Simmons

That's wonderful news. Sometimes it's helpful when I can have a little birdy feeding me certain information that I would have a hard time learning otherwise.

I need you to do something for me, if you don't mind. I want you to walk past Caroline Crisholm's office at several points today and see what she's doing. Just be casual. If anyone asks, say you were distributing some interoffice mail. Bring a notepad and make sure you tell me everything, no matter how unimportant it may seem.

Thank you,

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

Okay, I will let you know what happens. Should I say anything to my supervisor?

Roger Simmons

First, let's get a few things straight, Mr. Simmons. I need someone who can think on his feet. I said discreet. You know what discreet means, son? It means do what I tell you and keep your trap shut. Show me you can handle simple tasks like this and you will see how fast you move up the ladder.

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

Mr. Smith.

I did what you said. I walked past her office several times. The first time she wasn't there. An hour later she was on a conference call. She had two people in her office, a man and a woman. The door was closed so I couldn't hear what was said. The third time I walked past, it sounded like she was talking to her kids on the phone. She said she would pick them up later. Then, right before I left, I saw her walking out with a tall man, who had a beard. One of the secretaries said he was a VP of U.S. sales, when I casually asked who that man was.

I hope this helps somewhat.

Roger Simmons

What is it with you people and beards? You ever see a bearded man sipping a venti cappuccino? It's repulsive, all that foam dribbling all in the hair. It makes me want to gag. Thank you for reporting that. The person you are referring to will be laid off in the coming days. Not just for the beard, obviously. He's been hovering around Ms. Crisholm for weeks and doing a very poor job as of late. The beard is really just the final straw.

Now what about Ms. Crisholm?

You haven't told me anything. What did she say to the man? What was her body language like? Did they walk together or what? Next time, I expect you to be more thorough. What was she wearing?

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

I think she was wearing a business suit. Her hair was up. I tried to hear what she was saying but it was difficult without raising suspicions. If you want me to walk by again today, I will try to get more information.

Roger Simmons

There is something else you could do for me. There is a Starbucks on 5th and King. The service is usually good but last time I was there I noticed this very heavyset girl behind the counter. I don't know the girl's name but she was quite repulsive to the eye. Obviously, as CEO I can't just walk into a Starbucks and start firing baristas because I don't like the way they look, but this girl should not be allowed near scones, if you know what I mean.

If you want to earn a little extra money this weekend, I'd like you to go there and see if you can find out which girl it is. She needs to be terminated. I want the fat girl gone. Let me know when this is completed.

Thank you,

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

I stopped by the Starbucks but I'm not sure she was there. I asked the assistant manager and she wasn't sure who I was talking about. There was one girl who was kind of chubby -- not really fat, though. She had strawberry blond hair -- kind of a short bob cut. Does this sound like the person you were referring to? I don't want to fire the wrong girl.

Roger Simmons

I don't know. I didn't stare at the girl, I just saw her briefly. It's probably a good idea to get rid of her. The girl you saw sounds like she shouldn't be working there either. Anyway, it can wait until next weekend.

I will be leaving for Europe tomorrow. While I am gone, I would appreciate it if you could find out where Ms. Crisholm goes after work. This time I want details, got it? I will make sure there's extra pay in your check this week. Also, find out what she's wearing.

One last thing, please tell me more about your new apartment. I know this seems like a strange request, but I'm looking for somewhere where we can be away from the prying eyes of my wife. Not that I'm doing anything wrong, but her lawyers are bloodthirsty leeches. Do you have a hottub?

Make sure you delete this email after you read it. We need to be discreet.

Best regards,

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

No problem. As for the apartment, it's just a small one bedroom. And I do have a girlfriend so that probably wouldn't work.

Roger

Mr Simmons,

I'm back from Europe. It was a great trip, despite all the backstabbing.... Anyway, I am interested to hear the full report on the earlier matters we discussed. Please get back to me ASAP.

Best regards,

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

Okay, I hope it's not a problem but I didn't have a chance to go to the 5th Street Starbucks again.

Ms. Crisholm was not in her office for several days. Her assistant said she was away on business.

On Thursday she came in and she was wearing a maroon suit with black heels. She got a haircut I think. She had more blond streaks than I remember. Her office door was closed most of the time. She walked past my cubicle twice and was carrying a big grocery bag and some decorations. Also there was a birthday on Friday and she

stopped by and had some cake. I never saw her talking to anyone else except in passing.

Roger Simmons

This is not good, Mr. Simmons. I have my suspicions about Ms. Crisholm but the new hairdo says a great deal.

By the way, if you don't wish to participate in these tasks or help me in this manner, it will in no way affect your job or future here. Just say the word if you're uncomfortable and I will call upon any number of other ambitious people who can take over.

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

I am fine with the things you have asked of me (at least so far) so no problem there. I did forget one thing from while you were gone. I did see Ms. Crisholm walk out of the women's bathroom and she was wiping her nose and her eyes were red. For a second I thought she was crying, but when I saw her pupils I think that she may have been doing cocaine. I don't have proof, but I thought you might like to know.

Roger Simmons

Fantastic work, Simmons! You're a regular Sherlock Holmes. I have suspected drugs for a long time but you've confirmed it. Do you own a video camera?

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

I'm not 100% sure about the cocaine thing but I'm about 90-95% sure. I will look to see if I notice other signs. No, I don't currently have a video camera.

Roger Simmons

Roger, I think you are going to go far in this company. I like your go-getter attitude and I have no doubt you will do fantastic in the Starbucks corporate world. If you see or hear any employee doing anything that may harm this company, I want to know about it immediately.

Best regards,

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

There are a couple of people in my department who I know for a fact are overbilling their hours. I have a feeling this is going on a lot at this company. I think there needs to be more controls put in place. Thought you might like to know.

RS

That's great. Rest assured, those people will be fired. Before I am replaced in March, I will be cleaning this place from top to bottom of criminals and druggies. Heads are going to spin.

Speaking of apartments, please go ahead and make a duplicate of your apartment key and leave it in my secretary's mailbox. As we discussed, there are going to be times when I may need it for an hour or two.

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

Mr. Smith, I'm really not sure how to handle the apartment thing because it's just a one-bedroom apartment and I'm not sure my girlfriend will be comfortable with this arrangement. I hope you understand.

Roger Simmons

No problem. I'm sure I can work around your girlfriend's schedule.

Meanwhile, I need you to do something else for me. I'm scheduled to speak at UCLA's business school. There's a textbook I'm supposed to talk about: Business Ethics by Manuel G. Velasquez. I would appreciate it if you could buy the book on Amazon (I'll reimburse you for the costs), highlight the more important elements, then send it to my office. Whatever you do, don't put your name on it or what department it came from. I wouldn't want anyone to know I've asked for outside help with this.

Orin C. Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Starbucks Corp.

I skimmed the book and highlighted the important sections. I just sent it by interoffice mail. It should be there by the end of the day.

Roger Simmons

Fantastic Roger! That's wonderful. How fast and efficient you are. Now you

can concentrate on the other things I need you to do:

1. Write a list of all the cheaters and overbillers in your department as well as people you don't think are doing a good job. I want names.
2. Fire the fat girl(s) at the 5th street Starbucks. Fire any fat girls you see on the way.
3. Spend the day walking through the offices and find all employees with facial hair. Tell them they have 24 hours to shave or they're fired. Afterwards, see who shaved, but fire them anyway.
4. Tell my secretary she's fired. I don't have the heart to do it myself.
5. Please write a memo to the payroll department specifying that your salary is to be paid in espresso beans.
6. Enroll in massage therapy school. I have a bad back. I will reimburse you for expenses.
7. Fire your supervisor, but first see if you can lure her into sexually harassing you. Try to get pictures.
8. Show up to my lecture and give my speech on business ethics. At end of speech, drop pants to ankles and shuffle all the way home.

Holy shit. Who the fuck is this?? ■

For more of Shizzy Joyce's email pranks, visit bobfromaccounting.com.



From “Whassup?” to “Shut Up!”



It's been almost eight years since my friend and hero Leslie Savan stopped writing her advertising column in the *Village Voice* and hunkered down to write a book. Lo and behold, her labors have finally delivered us the think-book of the year: *Slam Dunks and No-Brainers: Language in Your Life, the Media, Business, Politics, and, Like, Whatever*. **A**t first blush, *Slam Dunks* is a bit of a departure from Savan's ad criticism. But on closer look? Not so much. The book focuses on American pop language—on everyday expressions and their ability to spread like viruses—"Bring it on!" "Whassup?" or "like." So how does this connect to Savan the ad critic? **I** imagine, if you will, a society overwhelmingly dominated by advertising aliens, one in which people not only confront ads in schools, hospitals, homes, and offices, but also internalize the language and values of advertising in their personal lives. How might you expect the inhabitants of this peculiar world to communicate? Well, one could reasonably expect that their lingua franca would resemble the advertising that surrounds them. It would be pithy, punchy, with a bit of Hollywood glitz. It would, in other words, be pop. **S**avan, in this smart and original book, documents the handprint of commercial media on American language, drawing parallels along the way between our homogenous cultural landscape and our increasingly homogenous language. Pop language, Savan convincingly argues, resembles advertising itself. She talked to me by phone from her home in New Jersey in November. —Carrie McLaren

WHAT DOES POP LANGUAGE TELL US ABOUT OUR WORLD? AN INTERVIEW WITH CULTURAL CRITIC LESLIE SAVAN

STAY FREE!: You mentioned that the strongest influence on pop is black American vernacular. Why is that?

LESLIE SAVAN: Under slavery, black people in America often spoke in code in order to communicate under the master's eye without him suspecting what they were really feeling. The code inevitably led to a kind of cool stance—a show of self-control and restraint. [As in, "keep cool."] They couldn't be seen yearning for escape. White people assumed a lot of slave songs were about God and heaven, when they were really more along the lines of, "Get me out of here!" Speaking in code also produced a lot of clever wordplay, and a playful, ironic alternative to the standard tongue. Creating a

language that allows you to speak to "the Man" while at the same time giving a wink to your fellows is in itself an art, a form of poetry. I'm interested in the point at which language changes from poetry to PR.

STAY FREE!: And, of course, the oral tradition is central in African American culture...

LESLIE SAVAN: Yes. Partly because throughout much of American history blacks weren't allowed to be educated or to own property. They passed things down using storytelling and music. To this day, a lot of black English is full of irony and wordplay, and much of that came down through music.

STAY FREE!: What about the origins of the word "cool" itself?

LESLIE SAVAN: It comes down to us from black American vernacular. "Cool" is the preeminent pop word—the engine that drives most of pop culture itself. The fashion business, the entertainment industry—they're all striving for the Holy Grail of cool. In this day and age you can't separate cool from consumption. We think we can buy cool through our purchases, or borrow it by using pop phrases, which are a form of advertising for ourselves.

STAY FREE!: Is the phenomenon of whites talking black universal? Does it happen in other cultures?

LESLIE SAVAN: There is a universal tendency to seek out what sociolinguists call "covert prestige"; that's where a high-status group gains prestige by

imitating a lower status group. It's not necessarily a white/black thing. In England, upper-class white men have been shown to imitate the speech of working-class white men.

STAY FREE!: Why? Because it makes them sound masculine and tough?

LESLIE SAVAN: Yes.

STAY FREE!: It's mostly men doing this?

LESLIE SAVAN: Yes, especially young men. Men are more prone to associate formal speech with being "proper" and feminine. This is nothing new; it's been true for generations. But more and more now, girls are also aspiring toward a certain toughness. In speech this comes out, say, in "You go, girl!" Or in women referring to themselves as "guys."

STAY FREE!: Corporations have been co-opting slang speech for ages. You mentioned that in the 1940s, Hallmark issued a "jive" series of greeting cards. In the past, this kind of mainstream attention signaled the demise of a slang term. Is that still the case?

LESLIE SAVAN: When a word goes mainstream, it's no longer slang or outsider, but it doesn't necessarily die. It might just lose its edge.

STAY FREE!: But don't some words die out once they become popular? "Jive" is a good example.

LESLIE SAVAN: Words of all kinds die when we don't need them anymore. Often, technology makes them irrelevant. Sometimes it becomes too embarrassing to use a particular phrase, but many phrases hang around longer than we think. I remember in the early '80s "Go for it!" was

hot, and we'd use it around the *Voice* office ironically. But we continued to use it long after it was hot, and after a certain point it ceased to be ironic. Even as tepid as the phrase has become now, it still has a patina of glamour, a bit of a punchline in itself.

STAY FREE!: You wrote a chapter on "weapon words"—expressions like "Hel-lo?!", "Puh-leeze!", and "EXCUSE me?"—that serve as a kind of comeback or put-down. Weapon words remind me of a trend in advertising toward portraying a beleaguered everyman who has to deal with annoying people, when the everyman would rather just be consuming some product. Like a husband will be playing sick in bed so he doesn't have to go out with his wife, and he's fantasizing about ducking out and riding around in a new SUV. Do you see any parallels with this kind of thing and weapon words? Both seem to reflect a kind of mean strain in pop culture . . .

LESLIE SAVAN: Many pop phrases are punchlines that replace a punch. As I say in the book, there are parallels between pop phrases and ads themselves. Both like to have snappy endings, both are good deal-closers. Pop phrases are basically mini- or micro-ads. They advertise us, tell our audience that we "get it" and that we have the crowd behind us. The first job of any ad is to get attention. Like effective ads, pop words are more likely to pull attention and consensus their way. The problem is that we're more likely to be persuaded not on the merit of an argument but on how catchy it sounds. When television first came out, people feared that images would overtake language and literacy. And in many ways they have. One thing I find interesting is that pop words are as much like images as words can be. In many ways, pop language has more in common with images than words—it's the word as image.

STAY

FREE!: Pop words are like brands.

LESLIE SAVAN: They're like logoed thoughts—or licensed thoughts, licensed in the sense that they seem to descend from something big and flashy in the media. They've got the sound of money running through them.

STAY FREE!: Your point about pop phrases working like images reminds me of an old debate among primatologists about gorillas and chimps that learn sign language. Some scholars say that when primates sign, they're not actually using language because they don't put words together to form original sentences. They're not coming up with their own ideas, they're just using isolated words, which, some argue, is comparable to dogs that do tricks. Maybe pop language is the equivalent of ape sign language, then. It's not actually language because the words aren't used in a sequence to form distinct ideas.

LESLIE SAVAN: That's a great metaphor. It's language at a primal level—a primate level! [laughs]

STAY FREE!: Many marketers have used pop phrases for advertising. And yet it still seems to be that many pop phrases don't have a specific author or source. Most don't originate with marketing but rather boil up from "real people." Why do you think that is?

LESLIE SAVAN: All language comes from real people. A phrase that began with an advertiser wouldn't attract as many people because most wouldn't know what it meant. You want to use language that people are already using. I think Wendy's really did come up with "Where's the beef?" But "Show me the money," which was

popularized by the movie *Jerry Maguire*, could be traced to a baseball player who almost certainly got it from someone else.

It's hard to draw a line between "real" people and Hollywood, because the words are reflected back. You could think of the road to pop as three steps. First, a phrase is used by "real people." Next, TV, movies, or advertising pick it up and spread it. And, finally, more real people use it, and with an extra bit of pizzazz.

STAY FREE!: Some pop phrases seem sourceless. I remember years ago, out of the blue, I started saying "HIH-larious" [with an exaggerated emphasis on *hih*] all the time and my friends came to associate it with me. But later I realized that people similarly say "hi-larious" [with an exaggerated *hi*].

LESLIE SAVAN: I've experienced that too with different words. Things come to us before we are conscious of them, and spread.

STAY FREE!: "Exactly" is another one.

LESLIE SAVAN: Right. It's a placeholder. When we flounder in conversation we grab certain words and feel more together and in control.

STAY FREE!: You write that street talk once rarely made it into print. And that it's only been relatively recently that the gap between written and spoken language has narrowed. Obviously, electronic media and marketing are a large part of that, but why do you think marketers were reluctant to use street talk in, say, the 1930s?

LESLIE SAVAN: Because it was associated with lower classes, and advertisers wanted to reach

higher classes. Of course, now advertising plays to "the street" because that's where it's at. This goes back to the idea of covert prestige. When corporations use black street language it comes from the same desire to be cool, masculine, and tough. This is deliberate. Companies pay big money to look like outsiders.

STAY FREE!: Yet corporations are as inside as it gets!

LESLIE SAVAN: Yes. There's a Sprint TV ad with a silver-haired CEO who says something like, "This will really show them that we want to stick it to the Man." His assistant replies, "But, sir, you are the Man." So Sprint execs are taking the fake rebel sell one step further—they're telling us they know they're ridiculous for claiming to stick it to the man, but are they cool or what for sticking it to the conventions of postmodern advertising?

But going back to weapon words, I've noticed that a lot of pop words—especially weapon words—end with what are called plosives, the letters B, D, G, K, P, T—and especially the last three. They have a hard sound. So do a lot of dirty sex words: "suck," "fuck," "shit," "poop"... and so do words that mean to hit: "hit," "pop," "whack." I think it's a primal thing. The sensation in the mouth resembles the sensation you're talking about—something connects and either hurts or penetrates.

STAY FREE!: Is this cross-cultural? Is it true in other languages?

LESLIE SAVAN: One linguist I talked to said no. But another linguist, who co-edited a book called *Sound Symbolism*, said yes. If you look at comic books in other languages, you'd see a fair number of plosives for words that essentially mean "hit." The word "pop" is itself a plosive. Making plosive sounds is fun! Explosions are fun—they provide a feel-

ing of release. That's the basis of pop language—the fun. And that's partly why it's such a useful tool to sell with. Fun, like sex, can persuade you of something that wouldn't otherwise stand on its own merits.

STAY FREE!: There's a good anecdote in your book about the origins of the word Coca-Cola ...

LESLIE SAVAN: A linguist was teaching an ESL class in the 1980s or so, and, to warm up the crowd, she would ask the students for words that had been incorporated into English from their native language. Well, these people from other countries all thought Coca-Cola came from their own country. They didn't believe her when she said it came from America.

STAY FREE!: Are academics studying pop language?

LESLIE SAVAN: They're always studying slang, but they're not looking much at the connection to media and marketing—unless, of course, they're anthropologist types hired by marketing researchers. Pop is really a dialect of media and marketing.

STAY FREE!: Conservative critic PJ O'Rourke has accused you of being a killjoy. How do you respond to people who mistake you for some kind of grammar police?

LESLIE SAVAN: I use pop phrases all the time; I can't think without them! [laughs] So I'm not saying pop language is "bad" and that you should never, ever use it. I just think it's fascinating to look at how language is changing and why. Does that make me a killjoy? I don't *think* so. ■

Photo essay > photos by David Gochfeld

Buzz Agents

A look at the secret lives of Brooklyn doormen

“Little fascinates New Yorkers more than doormen,” says the jacket copy on Peter Bearman’s recent sociological study *Doormen* (University of Chicago Press).

And while that overstates things just a tad, the role of doormen in the culture of New York City is indeed a curious one. What other job requires one to know the intimate preferences and proclivities of tenants, while addressing them from a socially sanctioned distance? • While most doormen in the city work in Manhattan, Brooklyn has a number of its own. Armed with a few insights from Mr. Bearman’s book, and with some help from 32BJ—the union for property service workers—we set out to document how some of Brooklyn’s troops spend their days.



About 20 years ago, Charles Graham (below) was training in computers, but found he preferred his new job at Concord Village, in downtown Brooklyn. "I said, 'Gee, this doorman job is a heck of a lot better than computers.' The salary was much better, the hours were great, and there was no guarantee that I'd make it [in high-tech]."

On one hand, Graham considers his tenants like family. He says, "Sometimes you feel like social workers. They're always coming down here asking your advice. After many years on the door you become very, very close ..." But while Graham has friends in the building, he says, "I always try to make sure I keep it doorman and tenant.... I have some tenants that I've known for years and I don't know what they do. I've never asked."

Though Graham's shift starts at 6 a.m., he arrives at 5:15 a.m. to get together with guys from other buildings for coffee and muffins. "I really love this job. I've been working all my life, but this is not work."

Julio Davila (opposite page) used to work with four-year-olds at Head Start in Lenox Hill. "Running around, chasing four-year-olds was a lot more fun," he says, but the money is much better where he is now. Still, his varied duties as a doorman on Clinton Street, downtown, include some occasional babysitting. "Tenants will say, 'Oh I forgot something upstairs, can you watch the kids for a few minutes?'"

Other duties? You name it. "If they're not getting enough heat in the apartment, we're the first people they call. Before they contact the handymen or the superintendent, they call us."





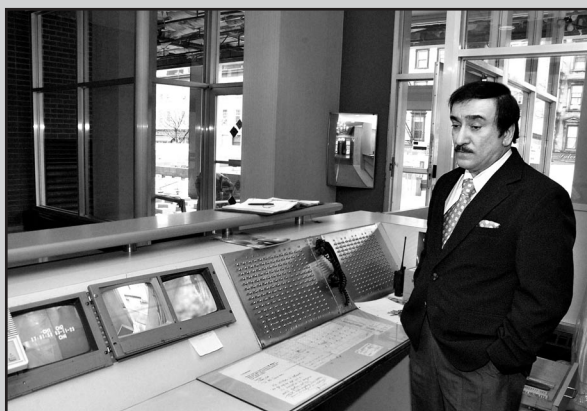
Like most doormen, Daniel Zelaya (above) first heard about the job through a recommendation from a friend. That was 23 years ago, after a stint as a chauffeur. Zelaya knows the families and friends of all 250 apartments in his building near Cadman Plaza by name. "Sometimes it's very boring," he says.

Freddy Barreto (right) commutes from Bay Ridge to his job in Brooklyn Heights. Born in Puerto Rico, he was trained as an electrician and worked for 18 years at a printing company before landing this job. "When I retire, I don't want anything. Just for people to say I did my job, and 'Freddy was a wonderful doorman, a wonderful person.' "

"Brooklyn born and raised" Ronald Williams (opposite page) has worked in Brooklyn Heights since 1983.

"It's a pretty interesting job, I have to say. I've seen little girls grow up, get married, and have children. I'm seeing second and third generations, you know.

"I've been here so long that people have a certain trust in me. Our confidentiality is valuable. Someone once said, 'Ron, I bet you know where all the bodies are—you know everybody's secrets. And the funny thing is ...'"





THE ESSEX GREEN CANNIBAL SEA



A SONGBOOK OF TIMELESS POP THAT FIND'S BROOKLYN'S HONEY-VOICED QUARTET CONJURING UP GREENER MEADOWS & ADVENTURE

ROBERT POLLARD FROM A COMPOUND EYE



NEW SOLO FULL-LENGTH FROM FORMER GUIDED BY VOICES MASTERMIND



east river pipe
what are you on?



"ONE OF OUR GENERATION'S GREAT ECCENTRIC SONGWRITERS" -ROLLING STONE

DESTROYER | Destroyer's Rubies



VANCOUVER'S DAN BEJAR RETURNS WITH A COLLECTION OF SHREWD POP MUSIC: EQUAL PARTS CYNICISM, DISDAIN, HOPE & HUMOR

OMWWW.MERGERECORDS.COMWWW.MERGERECORDS.COMWWW.MERGERECORDS.COMWWW.MERGERECORDS.COMWWW.M



A Message to Consumers from MERD Pharmaceuticals

The quest to help people is not one with hard-and-fast rules. Often, the right course of action can seem cloudy and indistinct, and one must rely on one's best instincts to make the right decision. Sometimes, of course, innocent mistakes are made.

The past 12 months have constituted a year of many grand triumphs here at MERD Pharmaceuticals; triumphs that have bettered man's condition in ways that can scarce be measured. And yet, it has also been a year of a few "tragedies" that have in no way affected MERD's overall mission, goals, or financial solvency.

We at MERD are sorry for these misunderstandings, and we want you to know that we take the input of all our clients, constituents, and customers with the utmost seriousness. That is why we are directly answering the issues brought up by the incidents that have occurred as of late. Many of these are trivial to the point of being able to be dismissed out of hand; charges such as "slave-like conditions," "criminal inattention to hygiene," and lurid descriptions of "frothy, smoldering sink-holes" smack of incredible bias and sensationalism, and as such deserve no further attention. We are confident that the already grossly mismanaged task forces investigating these dubious claims at any of our state-of-the-art research facilities will find nothing but the finest working and production facilities Micronesia has to offer.

Furthermore, recent inquiries regarding cer-

tain side effects of some of our most-loved and popular products, including Panexa™ (Acidachrome Promanganate), should only be given the attention and respect one would grant to any group of thousands of overly sensitive hypochondriacs who seem incapable of following the simplest of directions. How the members of this putative "class-action suit" ever even managed to open the bottles in question remains a continual source of amazement to our legal department.

One must always be wary of those seeking to profit from those who have grown successful by doing great works for the betterment of mankind. Our Lord himself once faced similar charges, and died on the Cross as a result. Like Him, we at MERD work solely in the interests of mankind and the health of all peoples of all nations. The petty, avaristic claims and charges leveled at the healers who toil for the good of humanity can only be viewed as motivated and driven from that other, opposed source of power, one that need not be mentioned here.

MERD is a proud organization and will continue to provide the top-notch goods and services that the peoples of mother earth have come to expect, need, and cherish. We are defiant in the face of these petty accusations, and have no doubt that we will, as always, emerge victorious.

Marcus T. Lomax
CEO, MERD Pharmaceuticals

Panexa
(ACIDACHROME PROMANGANATE)

Ask your doctor for a reason to take it. *Responsibly.*



www.panexa.com

AROUND TOWN

WITH EUGENE MIRMAN



As we all know, restaurants open every few days in brownstone Brooklyn. Here are a few that are great for dates, bringing your parents, meet-ups for indie band fans, or just going alone and trying to re-organize your life to put your family ahead of your career. What family? I forgot to tell you, you're pregnant! Congratulations. Lucky for you, you already live near families, day care, and many schools.

Bacchus

The food was very good. I had leg of lamb, French onion soup, and a dessert called Floating Island, which they assumed I was familiar with. I wasn't. When it arrived it was an island of custard in a sweet sea, with Napoleon in it, crying. I should have known. Poor guy. Still alive, but miniaturized and eaten by countless upper-middle-class Americans.

Though the food was great, my favorite thing was the active Frenchness. It was clearly a place where French people come to be super French. I sat next to a man who yelled to his American date, "When I was a child I would go to the butcher and get steak tartar and bring it home and season it with vodka and cognac." But even better, his date had ordered melon wrapped in prosciutto. She kept offering it to him and he kept politely turning it down. After she offered it a third time, he had had enough. "I can't stand melon. Your

melon stinks all the way from here." That is now my favorite expression. *Your melon stinks all the way from here.* (The distance was about one and a half feet.)

I left out the part (not for long!) where he had a five-minute argument with the waitress in French. I think he wanted a fork, but he may have also been passionately recounting *The Little Prince*. I don't speak French well enough to know. (409 Atlantic Ave., at Bond Street. 718-852-1572)

Brooklyn Fish Camp

One of my favorite new places. The spicy calamari is great; it's got chickpeas, tomatoes, and hot peppers. They often have a lunch special with two fried soft-shell crabs for \$14. Dinner entrées run \$18–25. Another appetizer? Lobster knuckles: delicious meaty joints, like lobster elbows. They're \$12 and chilled, served with warm butter. It's a fairly large portion (a bowl the size of a 12-year-old's head). (162 5th Ave., between Douglass and Degraw Streets. 718-783-3264)

Chestnut

I love soup. Sometimes I get more than one, but not too often because people find it off-putting, and I don't like unnerving people (with soup). I had a corn soup with frying peppers. I didn't know what that meant but I had some very reasonable guesses (my soup wouldn't be served with a cat's paw, but with some kind of spicy sea-

soning). I was right; it was fantastic.

The other nice thing about the place is that the staff was caring and attentive. They sat my friend and me at a table (which most restaurants will do). But when a large party came in, they asked us if we'd mind moving. So we moved, and as a thank you they made us delicious cocktails. Thanks, Chestnut. And thanks for the steak with blue cheese and the crusted halibut...or was it skate wing? (271 Smith St., at Degraw Street. 718-243-0049)

Stone Park Cafe

They have nice cocktails, and hamburgers that my friends claim are the best they've ever had. If you brought your parents here and tried to explain to them why some people were upset by gentrification, they wouldn't get it. You would have to compare it to some problem in the '50s that isn't really analogous. I think we all know this place has good food, so I don't have to tell you about it. It's sort of pricey. (324 5th Ave., at 3rd Street. 718-369-0082)

Kotobuki Bistro

On Mondays and Tuesdays they have all-you-can-eat sushi. Three rules: if you don't eat something you pay extra for it; you can't get sashimi; and you can't throw rice over the fence (something I did). Oh wait, I didn't throw rice. Did I want to? Very much. Did I? No. Why? Like a samurai (I use this analogy because we are talking about Japanese food, and though it isn't actually racist, it brings up race

issues, and I like to make people think, but about nothing) I have a code I live by. One rule: if a restaurant tells you to eat rice, you do, and you don't throw it. You probably have similar rules like, "I like dating bad boys" or "I wish I had a tail." (Hey, you don't have to tell me the second one isn't a rule. Because one of my other rules is "Know thyself.")

They have a pretty garden. (192 Columbia St., between Degraw and Sackett Streets. 718-246-7980)

Miriam

This place used to be called Surreal Ocean Café. Do you know why they changed it? People are confused by the notion of surreal food. The idea of a salad with a crying moon in it makes people nervous. The owners closed the place down and reopened it as a Mediterranean restaurant. I had only one dish, but liked it a lot: shish kabobs served on fresh rosemary skewers. There were two kinds of meat. I won't tell you which two—go and find out—and let me know. Delicious, though. And reasonably priced. (79 5th Ave. 718-622-2250)

Joy

I order delivery from this place all the time. It is fairly inexpensive and possibly the best Indian restaurant around Prospect Heights or Park Slope. (Bombay Grill is good, but most of the Indian places around here suck. I don't like to say mean things, I grew up believing if you don't have something nice to say you should write

it down, and blame it on an angry editor. So I'm not writing this, some higher-up is. And she thinks Star of India sucks—to a weird degree.) Anyway, Joy, tucked between a laundromat and an African arts store, is awesome. You know what, I grew up outside Boston, so I'm going to say Joy is *wicked* awesome. I love the Bombay Liver (which comes with great fluffy bread) and the vindaloo is great and spicy. (301 Flatbush Ave. 718-230-1165)

Sakura Cafe and Sea Land

I love fish, especially if someone has a new way of presenting it. For instance, Sea Land (in a Natural Land on Flatbush Avenue) is the only place that serves an "Ala Ala special," which is eel and various cooked fish over seasoned rice with caviar and pickled vegetables. It's awesome.

The board outside of Sakura said, "Master Chef." That's what convinced me: I would like to see what a master would do. And what he did was make a fantastic crepe with shrimp, mango, avocado, caviar, and a wasabi sauce. It was good and your parents will enjoy being in a place that seems so different from home, unless they are from Park Slope, then they won't be fazed at all. I also had a great sashimi appetizer and an unmemorable cucumber and crab salad. (Sakura: 388 5th Ave. 718-832-2970; Sea Land at a Natural Land: 320 Flatbush Ave. 718-398-0900)

Soccer Field somewhere in Red Hook

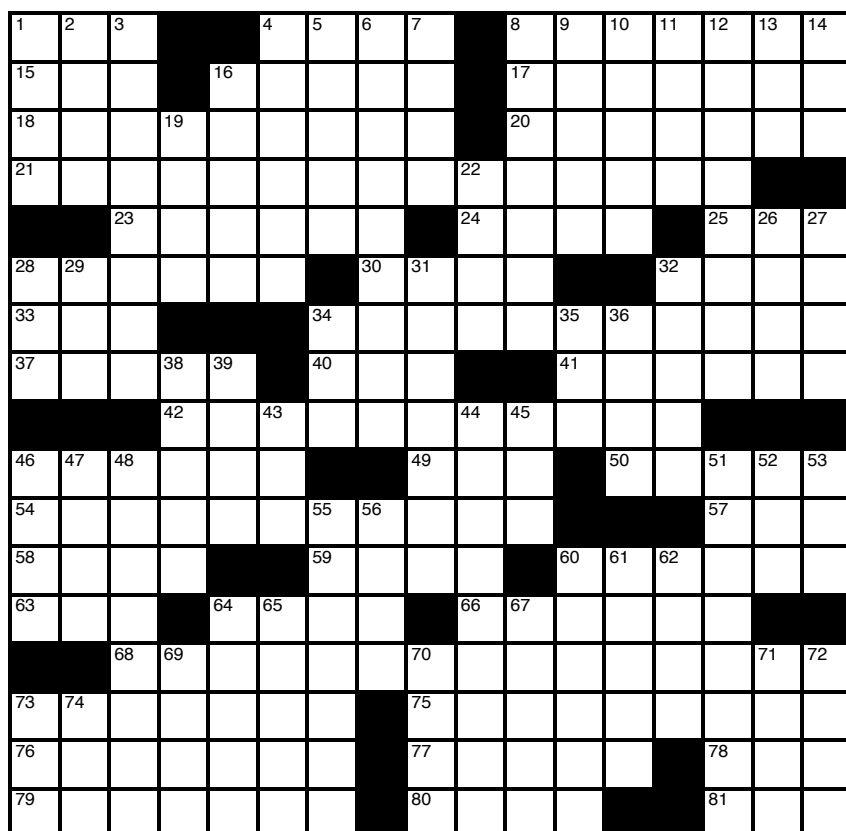
I heard rumors of this place. And two food-loving friends took me to what seemed like a magical food place at the edge of a field. Every summer, there are lots of young men who gather to play soccer in two adjacent fields. Their friends and families and spectators gather to watch. What if they get hungry? Well, these two fields are surrounded by trucks with delicious Latin and Hispanic foods. I had an amazing piece of grilled corn with mayonnaise, lime, spices, and grated cheese. I also had a giant taco, plus pastries stuffed with meats and vegetables and a great drink made with sweetened rose water. When summer comes around find this magic city and eat. (Near Clinton and Bay Streets, maybe farther out, but not in the ocean)

Freddy's

This is a great bar in Prospect Heights. If you've never been there, go. You'll like it. It has a nice warmth to it, and a back room with everything from live music to comedy to Leonard Cohen musicals. (485 Dean St., at 6th Avenue. 718-622-7035) ■



IN HONOR OF MACLAREN



ACROSS

1. Suggestion
4. "___ Parks Not Really Honored By New Bus Depot" (*Onion* headline)
8. Hurtfully criticizes
15. Sigh from Siegfried
16. Fix, after beta testing
17. New ___ (city that Congress is apparently happy not to rebuild)
18. Refusing to smoke it was an insult
20. Danner's daughter
21. Races sponsored by McLaren?
23. Command to the troops
24. Place for a spray
25. ___ *Girl Friday*
28. Matte alternative
30. Bearing
32. Vincent ___ (1994 Travolta role)
33. Sound of disgust
34. With 54-Across, McLaren's purchased because no other brands were available?
37. Like New York accents
40. PlayStation 2 game about a boy born with horns
41. "Hell is other people" author
42. Evenings spent using a McLaren?
46. Rapper born in Park Slope
49. Province that borders Michigan: Abbr.
50. Come apart at the ___

54. See 34-Across
57. Character that used to be friends with Christopher Robin, but will soon be friends with a spunky, red-haired tomboy instead
58. Lotion ingredient
59. "Not to mention..."
60. Without panicking
63. VCR button
64. Some show dogs, for short
66. Actor Ving
68. How the McLaren factory's security guards keep watch?
73. Something Bush doesn't have, but acts like he does
75. Like some characters
76. One who's begging
77. Didn't sit idly by
78. Faceless worker
79. Goes back for seconds
80. Bonnie Fuller's rag
81. Govt. bureau that wants to make it easier for businesses to avoid reporting on the release of toxic chemicals

DOWN

1. 1981 Sean Penn/Tom Cruise movie
2. Rapper who probably doesn't call

- attention to his role in *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*
3. Tut et al.
4. It may help settle a disputed call
5. Christopher Durang has won three of them
6. What many struggles are for
7. Elderly
8. Coloraturas
9. They may require a special shampoo
10. *Kate* and ___
11. Body part removed by a *guillotine*
12. Most unforgiving
13. He collaborated with Byrne and Bowie
14. Compass pt.
16. Takes out
19. Less-than-luxurious beds
22. ___ *After* (Drew Barrymore film)
26. Assistant in *Young Frankenstein*
27. Object that often falls from the sky in Warner Bros. cartoons
28. "They'll take my ___ when they pry it from my cold, dead hands"
29. Queens airport abbr.
31. Some transfers
32. It's not the chorus or the bridge
34. Smoke
35. 34-Down remnant
36. Gangsters' weapons
38. On top of
39. Clair de ___
43. Four-star rank: Abbr.
44. Wrong
45. It merged with Bell Atlantic to form Verizon
46. 1980s Chrysler offering
47. Part
48. Shaved-ice snacks
51. Cold War competition
52. Actress Gretchen
53. Source of some milk
55. English translation of Shakira's "Estoy Aqui"
56. "In this country American means white. Everybody ___ has to hyphenate": Toni Morrison
60. One telling a ghost story, perhaps
61. Totally freakin' psyched
62. Edward or Norman
64. Madrid museum
65. Tim Matheson, in *Animal House*
67. Until: Sp.
69. Kind of cheese I have had to clue approximately eleventy jillion times in my career as a crossword constructor
70. Palms, e.g.
71. Auto roof option popular in the 1970s
72. Dreamcast maker
73. Letters on a speedometer
74. ___ mode

ANSWERS ON PAGE 53

AN INQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTS OF PRESERVATIVES IN MCDONALD'S FOOD; OR, WHAT DOES THE FUNGUS KNOW THAT YOU DON'T?

Everyone knows McDonald's food isn't healthy, but is it really any worse than other fast food? A friend of mine told me about an experiment Morgan Spurlock did for his documentary *Supersize Me* that compared McDonald's food to a gourmet joint that sells homemade burgers and fries. (The experiment is a DVD extra.) Spurlock let food from both places sit out for weeks to see how McDonald's use of preservatives and other additives affected the way the food broke down. I liked the idea but wanted to see what would happen if, instead of using gourmet stuff, I experimented with the local equivalent of McDonald's—a cheap restaurant/take-out joint. So I went and bought burgers and fries from a nearby diner, New College Restaurant (4th Avenue and Union Street), and from McDonald's (4th Avenue and Garfield). I photographed each food item, put them all in a plastic bin, and placed the bin outside my apartment in the hallway. Then, I waited and observed. Here's what happened.

DAY 1

LOCAL FOOD

MCDONALD'S



Above, local fare from the New College Restaurant is placed next to food from a nearby McDonald's. Images of the burgers are not to scale; the local burgers are significantly larger. (The price is higher, too, though the per-ounce cost is roughly the same.)

DAY 3

LOCAL FOOD

MCDONALD'S



DAY 3 CONTINUES ON PAGE 52

HOAX•O•MATIC

A guide to calling journalists on their bluffs

A journalist needs a hot story for the evening edition of the news. He scours the net, finds rumblings of a hot item, rewrites the story, and publishes or broadcasts it. From there, other networks and news organizations, afraid of looking like they're late for the big event, hop on the story and begin touting it themselves. In the age of instant media propagation through the internet the problem has only gotten worse.

You don't know me, but you may have heard of my work. My partner-in-crime, Bill Doty from Brokennewz.com, and I have made a veritable hobby out of screwing with the above media model. That rumor about William Hung overdosing on heroin a year ago? That was me. The bit about Kenny Rogers' bodyguard getting arrested for beating up 19 people at a book signing? Again, me. The state of California giving free vasectomies to obese men to "stem the obese gene"? Yep, I did it. The Chihuahua is actually a feline species? Not me, but I taught that guy everything he knows. And now I'm going to teach you.

There are four aspects to pulling off a successful media prank: sensationalism, voice and structure, framework, and seeding.

SENSATIONALISM!!!

The story must invoke feelings of immediacy, urgency, and above all,

the desire to actually read the thing. Faking a story about an elderly couple being robbed in their home in Villa Rica probably won't garner media attention. But if the wife was a national champion in women's boxing in Thailand and summarily kicked the crap out of the burglars, you're getting warmer. Put one of the burglars in traction and throw in an arrest by police for assault, and you've got a prime candidate for media pranking.

VOICE AND STRUCTURE

Even a sensational story is worthless if it's written like a short story in a high-school annual. You have to correctly mimic the style and structure of your standard AP news wire story:

An elderly Villa Rica couple was arrested Thursday evening on charges of assault after the wife, Marna Phuy, 65, severely disabled an intruder in her home.

Phuy, a former world female Muay Thai kickboxing champion, contends that she was defending both her home and herself when she confronted one of the intruders.

"He had a knife," said her husband, Bob Roland, 69. "We woke up to a loud crash, and Marna charged downstairs. The burglar yelled and threatened to kill us. She saved our lives."

FRAMEWORK

You must place the story into a credible framework. For the Kenny Rogers prank, Bill and I built an entire web site—WTF-TV.com—that mimics the design of your typical local news web site.

Still, we gave journalists every opportunity to call us on our bluff; we even placed an "okay, you caught us" statement in our "About" section. No one ever found it, because the web site looked authentic enough at first glance that reporters unconsciously assumed it was real. With the illusion intact, writers copied the article—nearly verbatim—and reprinted it on MSNBC.com, FoxNews.com, and ABCNews.com. ABCNews Radio aired the story, and the MSNBC news ticker included it on the entertainment wire.

In order to get your story out there, you might choose to emulate a news site, create a press release, or print it in your local zine.

SEEDING

The major hurdle of any prank is getting the word out. Seeding is both the hardest and most important aspect. Because both Bill and I operate almost exclusively on the internet, the natural choice for our seeds was Fark.com, a popular link propagation site. We submitted the link, it was approved and posted on the front page, and from there, the

magic happened.

When you begin seeding your prank, you will likely encounter several hurdles. It seems that the propagation web sites (and especially their regular users) have a much finer sense of smell when it comes to detecting bullshit. Getting past them will be your hardest obstacle. Obviously, if you have connections with a source or are a longstanding member of a community that is routinely pilfered

for hot news leads, your chances of seeding will be much, much higher.

FINAL WORDS

Pulling off a successful media prank is as much an art as it is a science. Our goal has been to test journalists and, whenever possible, expose them as plagiarists and lazy louts. I would hope your goals would be the same—otherwise, the cause will

be denounced as “childish pranks” instead of being lauded for what it is—an attempt to bring some small degree of responsibility back to journalism. ■

We created this fake web site to frame our Kenny Rogers prank. To spread another hoax, all we would need to do is change the lead story.

On day three, the crinkle fries from the local joint show signs of mold. Nothing on McDonald's.

The McDonald's burger has a pronounced white spot—some kind of growth—toward the bottom right of the patty (see page 49). The local burger has several white areas and a thin white film coating sections of the burger. None of the spots on the local burger are quite as large as the one on McDonald's.

DAY 5

LOCAL FOOD

McDONALD'S



The local burger is now encrusted with something resembling cold sores: fuzzy white areas of a slight greenish tint. The white spot on the McDonald's burger has grown considerably, but the burger otherwise weathers the storm.

Thick green spores cap off the fuzzy coat on the crinkle

fries. McDonald's fries remain unharmed. Unfortunately, after putting all the fries back in the bin, I accidentally knocked over the tray so that the McDonald's fries fell on top of the local fries, contaminating them. (I didn't notice the mistake until . . .)

DAY 7

LOCAL FOOD

McDONALD'S



Local burger: the pigeons here wouldn't eat this. McDonald's has a three-quarter inch cluster cake on the top right region, and two small growths on the bottom section, but is otherwise clean.

McDonald's fries now show signs of decay, though perhaps that is due to the fact that I found them laying on top of the crinkle fries and had to pick them out and move them back to their own tray for the photo.

CONCLUSION

Do McDonald's differ from similar fast food restaurants? Anecdotal data suggests that McDonald's is less like food than its local equivalent, and therefore the answer is "yes." (However, for people who tend to leave food unrefrigerated around the house for days, McDonald's may be a better choice.)

Please note that the study does not control for varying moisture levels (dry foods are less subject to spoilage), nor the relative cleanliness of restaurant kitchens, and is therefore wholly unscientific.

Incidentally, Morgan Spurlock used individual, sealed glass jars for his experiment and didn't notice any appreciable differences in burger decay. His McDonald's fries, however, remained unvarnished and fungus-free for weeks. Since I contaminated my fries, I can neither confirm nor refute Spurlock's findings. And I wasn't going to repeat the test and risk pissing off my landlord, what with the stench and all. But perhaps you could try this with another nearby burger joint and let us know the results.

JERRY SPRINGER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

thing was actually pretty amusing. A bunch of people told me that it was the “best piece of television ever.”

For a few years, I would play the tape only when I had shows of my work (I’m a cartoonist and animator) and ran out of short films to fill my slot. Of course, all anybody ended up being interested in was the *Jerry Springer Show*. I guess part of me thinks it’s kind of sad that all my hard work and life achievements pale

in comparison to the hour I spent with Jerry. But then I just tell myself that it’s all the dominatrix outfit and I feel better.

Would I ever do anything like it again? No. Never. But, that said, I helped bring nonsense and Dada to national TV—and raise some important issues, too. I don’t think there’s ever been anything like it since. And the main producer who worked on it was fired shortly afterwards. That’s got to say something, right? ■

Maclaren Answers, from page 48

T	I	P		R	O	S	A		S	C	A	T	H	E	S
A	C	H		D	E	B	U	G		O	R	L	E	A	N
P	E	A	C	E	P	I	P	E		P	A	L	T	R	O
S	T	R	O	L	L	E	R	D	E	R	B	I	E	S	
		A	T	E	A	S	E		V	A	S	E		H	I
G	L	O	S	S		M	I	E	N		V	E	G	A	
U	G	H				C	A	R	R	I	A	G	E	S	O
N	A	S	A	L		I	C	O		S	A	R	T	R	E
			B	U	G	G	Y	N	I	G	H	T	S		
K	R	S	O	N	E			O	N	T		S	E	A	M
C	O	N	V	E	N	I	E	N	C	E				R	O
A	L	O	E			A	L	S	O		C	A	L	M	L
R	E	C		P	O	M	S		R	H	A	M	E	S	
			O	E	R	T	H	E	P	R	A	M	P	A	R
M	A	N	D	A	T	E		D	E	S	P	E	R	A	T
P	L	E	A	D	E	R		A	C	T	E	D		C	O
H	A	S	M	O	R	E		S	T	A	R			E	P

Stay Free! sells merchandise. Yes, we do. T-shirts, DVDs (hits from the Illegal

Enjoy
Corporate-Control

Art Exhibit, including Todd Haynes’ *Superstar: the Karen Carpenter Story*, *Wizard People*, *Dear Reader*, (the genius

spoof of the first Harry Potter movie, by Brad Neely),

CDS, back issues, and more. Can you tell I’m making

this ad as we go to press? Please forgive any typos, and don’t blame the copyeditors.

They’re not even going to see this.

SPRAWL★MART
ALWAYS LOWERING WAGES *Always*

STAYFREEMAGAZINE.ORG/ORDER.HTML

FREE SPEECH? FAIR USE!

Documentary Filmmaker’s Statement of **BEST PRACTICES IN FAIR USE**

Find out where and when doc filmmakers are employing “fair use” of copyrighted material to free creativity, cultural history and commentary!

Download your FREE handbook now from:
www.centerforsocialmedia.org

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: THE ORIGINAL PRANKSTER

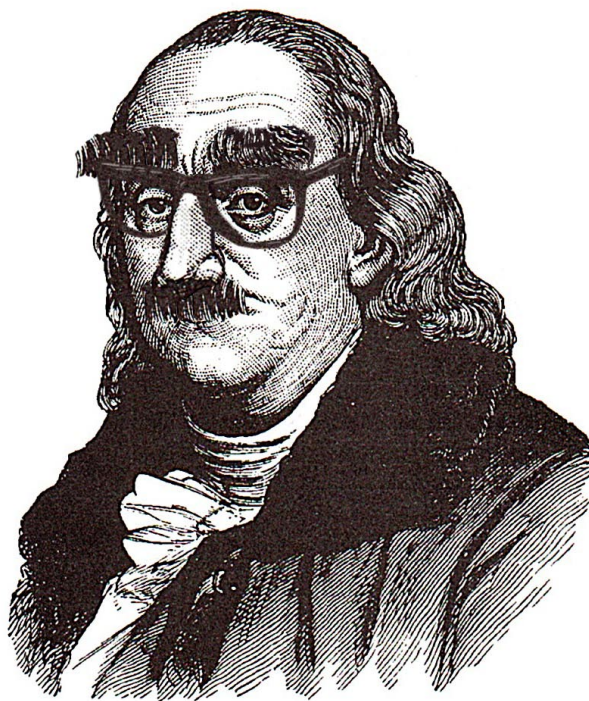
Long before Abbie Hoffman's media-savvy Yippies, Andy Kaufman's Dadaist wrestling stunts, and Ashton Kutcher's candid camera, the founding father of American pranksters cruised the streets of Philadelphia in a horse and buggy. Puff Daddy (now Diddy) referenced this rascally fellow on "It's All About the Benjamins"—and he wasn't talking about social theorist Walter.

No, Mr. Diddy was invoking Benjamin *Franklin*, who appears on the one hundred dollar bill. When rappers fling slow-motion wads of hundreds at the MTV audience, most people don't realize that the capitalist patriarch emblazoned on this bank note was a total and unapologetic freak.

By "freak," I'm not talking about the kinky variety celebrated by Rick James or LL Cool J—though it's true that the ladies loved Ben Franklin, and he loved them back, especially those advanced in age. (Franklin once crafted a list of reasons why "in all your Amours you should prefer old Women to young ones." "Because there is no hazard of Children." "Because the Sin is less. The debauching of a Virgin may be her Ruin, and make her for Life unhappy." "And, lastly: they are so grateful!")

When Franklin was sixteen and apprenticing at his brother's print shop, he secretly wrote letters to newspaper editors, signing them as Silence Dogood. The popular local newspaper, *New England Courant*, duly printed them, not knowing they were fakes. In an af-

fable, folksy voice, the disguised Franklin was able to launch subtle attacks on religion and hypocrisy that—no matter how nuanced and restrained—would have gotten a real author thrown in jail at the time.



Franklin loved pseudonyms, penning at least one hundred items under fake names throughout his life, including wildly popular early writings by Busy Body. Written in 1729 after Franklin moved to Philadelphia, these pieces—which were published in a local newspaper—were so popular they helped run a competing newspaper out of business.

Franklin bought *The Pennsylvania Gazette* from his competitor for a fraction of its market value, allowing him to

helm his first paper. From this position of political power and creative control, Franklin engaged in what he did best: producing satirical pieces that ruffled feathers and elicited guffaws.

In a bid to enter the almanac market, Franklin turned his literary guns on an established competitor, Titan Leeds. Under the pseudonym Richard Saunders, Franklin penned an advertisement and published it in his first edition of *Poor Richard's Almanac* (1732). The ad stated that *Poor Richard's Almanac* contained, among other things, "the predicted death of his friend Titan Leeds." Franklin narrowed it down not just to the date, but to the exact moment when two worldly bodies aligned ("Oct. 17, 1733, 3 ho., 29 m., P.M. at the very instant of the conjunction of the Sun and Mercury").

An annoyed Leeds loudly protested in the pages of his own almanac. He resented the prediction of his death, especially by a meddling jerk who most certainly was *not* his friend. The mini-scandal jolted sales of the almanac, so Franklin upped the ante in his next edition by moaning that he had been "treated in a very gross and unhand-some manner" by Titan Leeds, who, he argued, was surely dead. The prankster reasoned that his close friend could not possibly have been so mean, so it must have been his ghost who penned those rude diatribes. "Mr. Leeds was too well bred to use any man so indecently and

so scurrilously," he wrote with a wink, "and moreover, his esteem and affection for me was extraordinary."

"[H]aving received much abuse from the ghost of Titan Leeds, who pretends to still be living . . . I can not help but saying, that tho' I take it patiently, I take it very unkindly," he wrote in the 1735 edition of the almanac. "And whatever he may pretend, 'tis undoubtedly true that he is really defunct and dead."

Franklin had a crucial advantage: he printed his competitor's almanac as well as his own, and this inside knowledge allowed him to respond in his *Poor Richard's Almanac* before Leeds himself could disseminate his protests.

Even when Leeds finally did die in 1738, Franklin wouldn't throw in the towel. In the following edition of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, he quoted Leeds's ghost admitting that, "I did actually die at that moment, precisely at the hour you mentioned, with a variation of 5 minutes, 53 sec. which must be allowed to be no great matter in such cases."

Remaining in character as Leeds's ghost, Franklin issued one more prediction: John Jerman—another competitor in the almanac market who used Franklin as a printer—would convert to Catholicism. This was an outrageous claim, especially for those anti-Papist times. After four years of such barbs, Jerman took his business to another printer. By then, Franklin was too rich to care about lost business.

Franklin's final written prank was an act of social consciousness. He published (under the name Historicus) an over-the-top letter to the *Federal Gazette* that sent up pro-slavery attitudes popular at the time. Despite owning slaves for thirty years earlier in his life, Franklin had morphed into a staunch abolitionist. To his credit, when he did come out against slavery, he did so with force, writing powerful diatribes against the barbaric practice. Just before his death in 1790, his subtly humorous letter to the editor essentially advocated the slavery of Christians. In response to an anti-abolitionist speech by Georgia Representative James Jackson, Franklin

(Historicus) recalled a speech made by a fabricated Islamic slave trader named Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim.

"Sir," he wrote, "Reading last night in your excellent Paper the speech of Mr. Jackson against their meddling with the Affair of Slavery, or attempting to mend the Condition of the Slaves, it put me in mind of a similar one made about 100 Years since by Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim."

In this thinly disguised satire, Franklin quoted Ibrahim's speech, in which the slave trader argued that Christians should be the ones to perform hard, enslaved labor. He wrote, "who in this hot Climate are to cultivate our Lands? Who are to perform the common Labours of our City, and in our Families? . . . And is there not more Compassion and more Favour due to us as Mussulmen, than to these Christian Dogs?"

Franklin approvingly quoted another (likely fictitious) source, which shrugged its shoulders at the notion that enslaving Christians was an unethical practice. "The Doctrine, that Plundering and Enslaving the Christians is unjust, is at best *problematical*; but that it is the Interest of this State to continue the practice." He concluded in his characteristically deadpan style, "I am, Sir, your constant Reader and humble Servant, Historicus." Pandering to the Christian, pro-slavery readers of the newspaper at the beginning of the letter, he slyly inverted the popular logic of slavery by the end, holding up an inverted mirror to the anti-abolitionists.

Although Franklin was clearly a rascally prankster, he also made a lot of money with his Richard Saunders hoax. Like Diddy, the "early to bed, early to rise" businessman epitomized capitalism—so much so that the sociologist Max Weber referred to him as embodying "the social ethic of capitalist culture." He certainly couldn't be placed on the far-left side of a radical spectrum that includes Abbie Hoffman, but Franklin was a subversive in his own odd way.

American hero? Perhaps. American weirdo? Most definitely. ■

Reader pranks

continued from p. 15

open and shut.

Sue was chosen as the target for this prank specifically because she had an almost phobia-level fear of the dark and pretty much believed in ghosts. Well, Sue started bawling like a baby. Oh God, the terror in her eyes! She curled up in a shaking ball. We all freaked out. We started pulling roller skates out of hiding spots and begged her to pull her head out of the fetal position long enough to look at the fishing lines. It took a really long time to calm her down. The whole thing scared the rest of us pretty bad.

CAROL KOLB

A parody of the *New Yorker* was my favorite of all the pranks that my coworker at the Modern Humorist and I did, because for months afterwards, we got poetry and fiction submissions from people who didn't get the joke. (Originally the site was located at newyorkermag.com, but we moved it to modernhumorist.com/mh/0012/newyorker/ after the *New Yorker* built its own web site.)

MICHAEL COLTON

MY NEW FAVORITE THING

COOK'S ILLUSTRATED

I never realized how fun reading about cooking was until I discovered *Cook's Illustrated*. The magazine approaches food without all the bullshit and simply gets down to brass tacks. By bullshit, I'm talking about the glossy photos of perfectly prepared food, dewy memories of eating risotto in a hillside town in Tuscany, and features on the hot chef or ingredient of the moment. For *Cook's Illustrated*, it's all about the flavor. They outline what they want from a particular dish, then methodically use trial and error to achieve it. Whether it be delicious enchiladas in under an hour or simply getting the most flavor out of shrimp bisque, all avenues are explored and, more often than not, result in extremely tasty recipes.

Like *Consumer Reports*, *Cook's* eschews all paid advertising. So, if you're looking for ads for kitchen appliances that cost more than I make in a year, you'll have to look elsewhere. However, if you want to know the best brand of red wine vinegar or the best electric knife sharpener, you



can make more informed purchases, thanks to extensive testing by the *Cook's Illustrated* staff.

Despite the seriousness of its approach to food, *Cook's* is not geared toward foie gras-eating sophisticates. Most of the recipes are cooking classics or home favorites. And any cooking magazine that tests 14 brands of pre-cooked pork breakfast sausages—and makes me want to look up its recipe for French toast—is one that has won my heart. —Chris Karwowski

FEMA CUISINE

As we approach a climate-change-induced era of apocalyptic terror, it's nice to know we can still dine in lip-smacking style. These FEMA food packets are designed for even the pickiest of eaters, with special menus intended for vegetarians and Creoles. The grim meat hook future of terrorist bombs, black outs, category 5 hurricanes, and 7-foot tsunamis won't be so grim once the thick brown plastic is ripped open and the chemically prepared and shelf-stabilized scrumptious treats come out!

So tuck in your neck napkin and let's dig in!

A small sampling of FEMA packet descriptions available for diners today:

- 2 boneless pork chop
- 12 bean & rice burrito
- 19 beef with mushrooms
- 22 jambalaya
- 14 pasta with alfredo sauce
- 13 cheese tortellini
- 23 chicken cavatelli
- 15 beef enchilada
- 9 beef stew
- 11 spicy penne pasta
- 17 beef teriyaki
- 21 chicken tetrazzini
- 20 spaghetti

—Keira Alexandra and Toby Barlow

LOS ANGELES

In the New York area, we are born and bred to despise the plastic phoniness of Los Angeles. I smugly nodded in agreement as countless comedians in front of countless brick-wall backdrops proclaimed New York's superiority to L.A. When the east coast/west coast hip-hop wars erupted, I proudly stood with my New York brethren. Well, I would



have, if I wasn't exclusively listening to wussy twee pop.

But then I visited Los Angeles. And to quote Randy Newman, I love L.A. You know the crappy little apartments we all

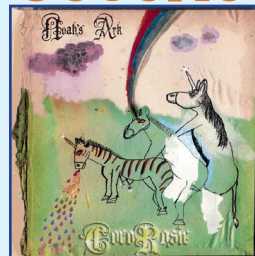
live in? In Los Angeles, they live in crappy little houses. With scrubby little yards. Maybe there's a palm tree off to the side. It's nice. It's mel-low. They can drive to the beach in a few minutes. (But don't drive between the hours of 5 a.m. and 10 p.m., unless you want to be stuck in the most ungodly traffic you've ever experienced.)

And that story they've always fed us about California being incredibly health-conscious? A beautiful lie. They eat the same junk we do, and more so. Along any street, every third shop sells burgers, donuts, or tacos. While the major fast-food chains dominate New York, any dreamer with a first name can open an eatery in L.A.: Billy's Burgers. Donald's Donuts. Tico's Tacos. If these don't already exist, they will soon.

Also, L.A. has saber-toothed tigers and the La Brea

Touch and Go Quarterstick Records

CocoRosie



Noah's Ark
Lp/Cd

Pinback



Summer In
Abaddon
Lp/Cd

Calexico



Garden Ruin
Lp/Cd

Quasi



When The Going
Gets Dark
Lp/Cd

www.touchandgorecords.com
Touch and Go Mailorder: Call or write to request a free
catalog. 1-800-3-TOUCH-UP/PO Box 25520 Chicago, IL 60625



Tar Pits. Black goo bubbling out of the ground! They've pulled out and reconstructed 40,000 years of animal skeletons. The closest we come to that in New York? Occasionally they'll find a sack of dead cats in some old woman's apartment.

Don't get me wrong, I'm staying in New York. But you—struggling actor—give L.A. a shot. And I'm not just saying that to get your seat on the subway. —*Jack Silbert*

BROWNSTONER.COM

For as long as I can remember, I've been saving my money under the assumption that I would one day buy a house. Now that the time has arrived, I've become obsessed with Brownstoner, a blog published by a disaffected Wall Streeter who is himself obsessed with historic Brooklyn homes.

The main site is mostly highlights of new houses for sale, local neighborhood news, and New York real estate info. Much of this I could survive without, just as I easily ignore much of the material on my other favorite blogs. What really gets me going is the forum, the section where local home owners and other real estate junkies post questions related to my new favorite topic—home

maintenance! What is a boiler chimney? I have no idea, but many readers of Brownstoner do and they will answer your questions, friend. What is the best roofing technique? How can I stop that knocking in my furnace? Can anyone recommend an electrician who will keep an appointment?

I pore over all of this with the borderline unhealthy fascination of someone who has spent ages with her head in the world of ideas and arguments and is only now realizing how little she knows about the physical world. I even read about problems I couldn't possibly imagine experiencing.

My fiancé and I are in the process of buying a house in Prospect Lefferts Gardens. Hopefully we won't run into asbestos floor tiles, fraudulent contractors, or mystery basement leaks, but if we do, I'll sleep a little bit easier knowing that scores of my neighbors have already been through it—and have lived to write about it. —*Carrie McLaren*

TURDUCKEN

Turducken. Turkey, stuffed with duck, which is stuffed with a hen, which is stuffed with yummy-to-your-tummy cornbread dressing and andouille sausage.

Yes, I realize that Turducken isn't exactly a new thing, seeing as how it has been prepared as a holiday dish in Maurice, Louisiana, since 1985. But I'm not from Maurice, Louisiana. Nor have I ever been there.

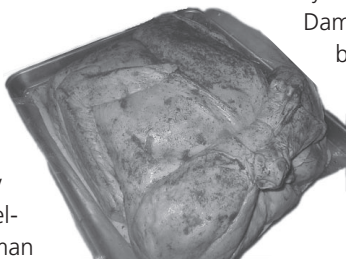
So this year was my very first ever Turducken experience. And like any marginally intelligent young man with the ability to harness the power of the internet to mail order one for slightly less money and a LOT less time than it takes to fix one yourself, I opted to make my own this year using Cajun chef Paul Prudhomme's recipe.

The very first thing I have to note is that the time listed in the recipe for preparation (including cooking, about 12 hours) is a goddamn lie. It takes about three days and a VERY sharp knife to do properly. However, if you're patient and can handle cutting yourself no less than 20 times in various areas (including one tiny slice on my chest and a puncture wound through my left foot), the results are nothing short of rewarding. I ended up with enough broth to make about 5 gallons of an amazing chicken soup concoction (which I froze for later) and enough leftover meat to make mighty, mighty sandwiches (we're talking foot-long sandwiches here, folks. Dagwood sandwiches).

Anyway, that's my new favorite thing. MEAT. And lots of it, stuffed into more meat, and roasted up for my glut-tony. —Joe the Peacock

KATAMARI DAMACY Namco; Playstation 2

Katamari Damacy!!! Katamari Damacy!!! Katamari Damacy is ultimate of game! Roll nice a sticky ball to collect everything! Katamari Damacy!!! Make ball of stickfullness bigger and bigger at all costs! Time will run out if you do not urgently enlarge purposeful ball! Purchase Playstation 2 just to play Katamari Damacy!!! Pick up not just thumb tacks but also dice in Katamari Damacy!!! Electronically roll sticky ball! Roll and roll and roll! When 40-foot-tall Freddie Mercury commands you to roll sticky ball, Goddammit, you will roll sticky ball!!! Katamari Damacy!!! Fear The King of All Cosmos and his terrifyingly huge package!!! Roll out of doors to pick up flowers and poles! Grow in size and pick up increasingly massive articles! Katamari Damacy!!! People and cows scream as they adhere to undeniable sticky ball! Grow and grow! Become a titanic ball and pick up buildings! All crimes ever committed against you are avenged as you roll over neighborhoods and pick up houses! Yaagh!!! Katamari Damacy!!! Play no other game!!! Play only Katamari Damacy!!! Do not play the sequel, We Love Katamari, because it is even more fun



and you deserve only Katamari Damacy fun! Play Katamari Damacy and nothing else forever! Do not stop playing Katamari Damacy ever! Stop playing Katamari Damacy only if you are brilliant scientist, and then only to invent a real-life growing sticky ball to play real-life KATAMARI DAMACY!!! Roll sticky ball down Flatbush Avenue and collect all! Good-bye, Pintchik Hardware! Yummy Taco and Bergen Bagel are gone! Now they are sticky ball! Do not pause to reflect if it may be fun! Fun is a non-issue! You exist to serve King of All Cosmos! KATAMARI DAMACY!!! KATAMARI DAMACY!!! — Tim Harrod

PODCASTS:

**The Wall Street Journal
Tech News Briefing
(wsj.com)**

**The Sound of Young
America (splangy.com)**

Like TiVo for the less social, podcasts are totally addictive. I bought into the media hype wholesale, but I love 'em. As soon as they became super easy to use, I started subscribing like a madman. ABC's *Nightline*, NPR's *On the Media*, the *Presidential Weekly Radio Address* and my neighbor's weekly Mohawk vocabulary lesson . . . I mean, hell, they're free!

That said, there are two that I listen to without fail. In five minutes, the *Wall Street Journal Tech News Briefing* brings me up to speed on the latest tech news, such as the possible shutdown of Blackberry service,

due to patent infringement and the fact that, in the first day of offering, SuicideGirls.com logged 500,000 video iPod downloads. The show routinely cuts to Vauhini Vara, purportedly an expert, but actually a 23-year-old cub reporter. Good stuff. And at five minutes, I can hear it all on my walk to the subway.

My other essential podcast is *The Sound of Young America*. (Writer's disclaimer: I have appeared as a guest on the program twice. Had I not, I probably wouldn't be aware of the show.) Originating in Santa Cruz, TSOYA is hosted by the self-proclaimed "America's Radio Sweetheart," 24 year-old Jesse Thorn. Described as a cross between Terry Gross and Conan O'Brien, Thorn interviews authors, rappers, and, most often, comedians. While Thorn sometimes enthusiastically talks over his guests rather than letting them answer, you still get a solid, well-researched interview, and Thorn only has guests that he admires. Chalk it up to his platform of "new sincerity," and check out his full-show interview with his radio idol Bob Edwards for classic Sound. (Writer's disclaimer: Thorn did not talk over me during my interviews, although he probably should have.) —Joe Garden

**ADVERTISE
HERE AND BE
WEALTHY
CM@
STAYFREE
MAGAZINE.ORG**



WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

*

Stay Free! donors keep us going despite some rather daunting odds, and for that we sincerely thank you.

*

Donations to Stay Free! are tax-deductible and can be made online at stayfreemagazine.org or via mail to Stay Free!, 23 Hawthorne Street, Brooklyn, NY 11225. Donations of \$40 or more will be acknowledged in the magazine; these donors will also receive their choice of either the Illegal Art Exhibit DVD-R (including videos by Todd Haynes, Eugene Mirman, and more) or a Wizard People, Dear Reader double-CD.

\$100 OR MORE

James Cavoli
Jeffrey Walker
Karl Kolbinger
Newsweek
Raj Patel

Brooke Singer
C. Adler
Cabaret Voltaire
Caren Dashow
Carl Mazer
Carol Cates
Carrie Lambert-

Beatty

\$30 OR MORE

Aaron Carlisle
Ahmad Taylor
Alan Becker
Alexandra Kolod
Allan Dameron
Amy Goldstein
Angela Rodriguez
Ann Torke
Anthony Vitelli
Ateet Tuli
Barbara Weir
Benjamin Palmer
Bernice Cross
Bradford Nordeen
Brandon Gillian
Brenton Fletcher

Cath Lecouteur
Chris Kimbler
Christian Seberino
Claire Eike
Daniel Cashin
Darren Shaw
Deborah Price
Don Ross
Donald Jones
Elizabeth J. Chin
Frank Galloway
Gary Strickland
Gayle Roberts
George Theodoris
Heidi Cody
Helen Castleman

Hope Mandeville
Hyeon Seok Seo
Ian Macmillan
Jackie Sheeler
James Brown
James M. Allenspach
James Poole
Jeff Whitty
Jennifer Bolande
Jerry Jaz
Jesse Paulsen
Jimmy Mcro
John Palmer
John Shorney
John Stubbs
Joseph Fisher
Kalley Mihalko
Karen Evanouskas
Kathryn High
Kelly Eppler
Kelly O'connor
Ken Gonzales-day
Kerry Richardson
Kevin Centanni

Kimberly Fullman
Ky Woolf
Kyle Oba
Larry Auerbach
Leonard Smith
Linda Horrell
Linda Palmer
Lisa Dawn
M. Robert Turnage
Mafalda Stasi
Marc Salomon
Mark Wyatt
Marsha Radford
Martin Allor
Matthew Henshaw
Maurice Saylor
Michael Platt
Natalie Masse
Nicholas Freeman
Norman Cowie
Patricia Bruck
Paul Poux
Penny Lane
Philip Rackin

Raymond Evers
Rebecca Burnham
Rick Jones
Robert C Kircher Jr.
Robert Slaven
Robyn Wagner, Esq.
Rodrigo Montealegre
Roger Hallas
Ronald Bernardini
Ross Fletcher
Sandra Rechico
Sara Pahl
Scott Reardon
Sean Fitzgerald
Sheryl Orlove
Siobhan Rigg
Stephen Lew
Stevan Wolfe
Steven H. Wood
Theresa Ottina
Timothy Lawrence
Victor Schwartzman
Victoria Wood
Virginia Myhaver